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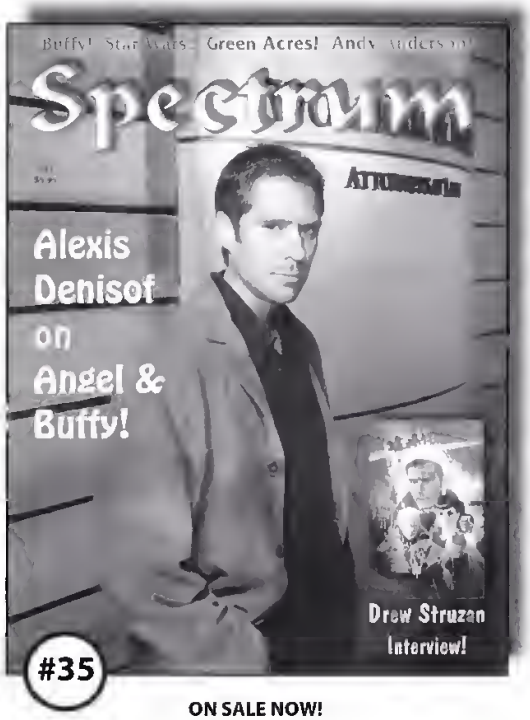

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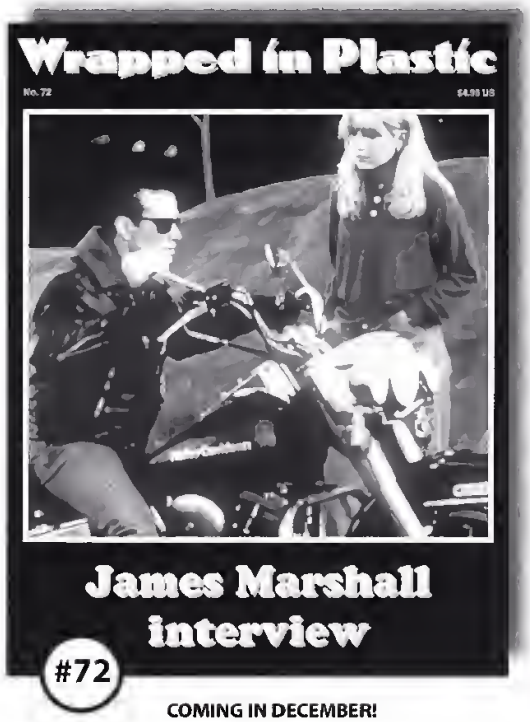

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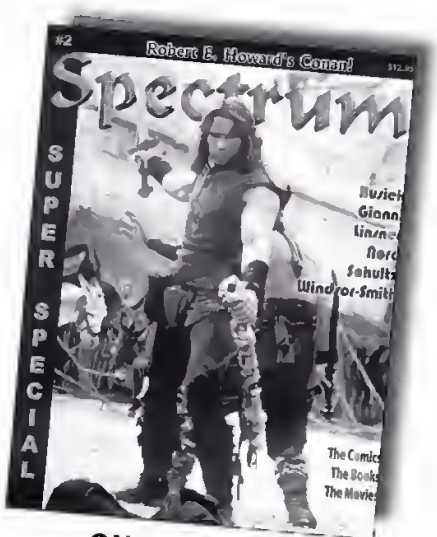

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Front cover photo from *Fire Walk With Me* © New Line Cinema

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Subject of Choice: The Realization of Laura Palmer

Introduction

David Lynch is not known for making "easy" movies. A Lynch film almost always demands its audience to pay attention, to reject commonplace assumptions about narrative, to question the meaning of the images and the context in which they are presented. Even Lynch's most basic films (*The Straight Story, The Elephant Man*) contain confusing and potentially contradictory elements. It is not surprising, then, that Lynch's "difficult" films receive the most debate and analysis (as was evident with his most recent film, *Mulholland Drive*).

If we measure Lynch's films in terms of how hard it is to comprehend them or by how many baffling and contradictory elements they contain, then Lynch's most difficult film is *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*. Ironically, this film has received less academic examination than other Lynch movies, perhaps because *Fire Walk With Me* seems so incomprehensible. "An impossible film," according to Lynch essayist Michel Chion, the 1992 prequel to the television series *Twin Peaks* is also arguably Lynch's least accessible: "[It] operates on an impenetrable, unreadable surface....It is seamless; there is no way in."[1]

Even to begin appreciating the film's themes and storylines, one must have some familiarity with the original *Twin Peaks* television show (co-created by Lynch and writer/producer Mark Frost) that aired on ABC TV during 1990 and 1991. Although *Fire Walk With Me* was designed (and can function) as a stand-alone film, knowledge of the series certainly makes the film a richer and more rewarding experience.

This lack of knowledge about *Twin Peaks* likely contributed to the harsh critical reception *Fire Walk With Me* met when it was released. In fact, *Fire Walk With Me* received the most scathing reviews of any Lynch film. Roger Ebert called it "meaningless [and] simpleminded." Owen Gleiberman of *Entertainment Weekly* wrote, "The movie is a true folly—almost nothing in it adds up." And Jeff Shannon of *The Seattle Times* said, "The film is an incoherent travesty of loose and dead ends."

These extreme reviews are knee-jerk reactions to the difficulties inherent in *Fire Walk With Me*. But rather than give David Lynch some artistic benefit-of-the-doubt, too many critics angrily dismissed the "incoherent" *Fire Walk With Me* as either "scornful" (Ebert), "sophomoric" (David Baron, *The Times-Picayune: New Orleans*) or, worse, "lacking any artistic conviction" (Jay Carr, *The Boston Globe*).

There is no question that some movies are bad (for any number of reasons), but some movies are labeled as bad simply because people don't "get them." Often these are challenging, experimental works that require more from an audience (and from critics) than most films. To declare that *Fire Walk With Me* has no artistic conviction or that portions of the film are meaningless proves that many viewers of *Fire Walk With Me* do not appreciate David Lynch's unique approach to filmmaking; nor do they understand—in this specific case—how David Lynch was trying to further expand and explore the intriguing world he helped establish on the television series.

This essay will show that despite its seemingly irreconcilable narrative, *Fire Walk With Me* remains a meaningful and cohesive film, one that tells a satisfying and complete story about its doomed protagonist, Laura Palmer. This essay will examine how the Laura Palmer character changes and grows through the course of her story. Further, the essay will show how David Lynch, in seeking to make Laura a complex, fully-realized character, found it necessary to make unforeseen edits to the film (particularly the scene depicting Laura's murder) and alterations to the already-established Laura Palmer backstory. These changes, necessary as they were, transformed Lynch's original vision of *Fire Walk With Me*. Once enacted, Lynch's modifications heightened the film's ambiguity and made deciphering *Fire Walk With Me* a more difficult and problematic affair.

Part 1: The Journey of Laura Palmer

David Lynch said he made *Fire Walk With Me* because he was fascinated with the Laura Palmer character. She was "radiant on the surface but dying inside. I wanted to see her live, move and talk." Lynch also explains, "I was in love with that world and I wasn't finished with it."[2] *Fire Walk With Me* was Lynch's effort to return to Twin Peaks, to uncover more of its secrets and—most importantly—to bring Laura Palmer to life.

Fire Walk With Me tells more than one story, but most of the film is devoted to the events of the week leading up to Laura Palmer's murder. (The other stories in *Fire Walk With Me* deal with FBI investigations into another murder, the introduction of F.B.I. Special Agent Dale Cooper to the otherworldly forces that surround Laura Palmer, and the "power struggle" between these forces that make their home in the "Black Lodge," a.k.a. The Red Room.[3]) The subtitle of the film, found on the shooting script and on the film's overseas theatrical ads, reads, "The Last Seven Days of Laura Palmer." Why are these seven days important? What happens in them? In short, what story is there to tell about Laura Palmer?

From the series, we know that Laura was extremely troubled. "She was two people," according to her psychiatrist, Dr. Jacoby. She exhibited destructive behavior (prostitution, taking drugs) while simultaneously showing an altruistic side (volunteering for the Meals On Wheels program, tutoring the mentally handicapped Johnny Horne). Laura was frightened of a menacing figure named "Bob" and, just before she was killed, she became despondent about "Bob" and his true identity. According to Dr. Jacoby, Laura "may have allowed herself to die" (episode 2001) and, accord-

[1] Michel Chion, *David Lynch* (London: BFI Publishing, 1995), p. 157.

[2] *Lynch on Lynch*, edited by Chris Rodley (London: Faber and Faber, 1997), p. 184.

[3] See "Dreams of Deer Meadow" (*Wrapped in Plastic* 60, August 2002) for more about Dale Cooper's unique role in *Fire Walk With Me*.

All *Twin Peaks* photos © Twin Peaks Productions. All *Fire Walk With Me* photos © New Line Cinema.

ing to Laura herself, (through her diary) she "had to die because it is the only way to keep Bob away from me" (episode 2009).

As the series progressed, Agent Cooper learns that Laura's father, Leland Palmer, was Laura's killer and that he was probably "possessed" by the demonic figure Laura called "Bob." When Leland died (in episode 2009) he explained, "Bob made me do things...he wanted others, others they could use, the way they used me....They wanted Laura...they wanted her, but she was strong. They made me kill that girl, Teresa. They said if I didn't give them Laura, they'd make me kill her, too."

Fire Walk With Me explores the relationship between Laura and Bob, and it reveals more about the death of Teresa Banks at the hands of Leland Palmer. During the last seven days of Laura's life, she confirms the identity of Bob and comes to realize that her father killed Teresa and—as Bob—has been sexually abusing her for years. The story of *Fire Walk With Me*, then, is the story of that realization and the consequential despair Laura suffers. Laura's "double life" is depicted as an internal struggle as she attempts—and fails—to resist a life of depravity and self-abuse. The "good" side of Laura erodes as she is consumed by self-loathing and a feeling of inescapable of doom. But this good side is never extinguished; Laura manages to keep the evil forces (led, apparently, by Bob) at bay. She does this by never physically hurting another person. She refuses to allow "them" to use her as a means of inflicting pain on another. This is crucial. Laura's descent into evil is never complete, because she is strong enough to resist hurting others. When the bad side of Laura is manifest, she hurts only herself. The undying element of good in Laura ultimately leads to her salvation. At the very end of her life she knows she will die a good person.

Fire Walk With Me charts the struggle between the two people who are trying to be Laura Palmer. This struggle in an individual is a theme Lynch has explored in other works. Before scripting and shooting *Fire Walk With Me*, Lynch directed the final episode of *Twin Peaks* in which Dale Cooper physically enters the subjective realm of the Red Room/Black Lodge. Lynch reworked the original script of this episode, transforming it into a conflict between the good and bad sides of Dale Cooper. (The original script had Cooper pitted against Bob and Cooper's arch-nemesis, Windom Earle. In it, Cooper was battling an external force, something Lynch likely found of little dramatic interest.) Ultimately, the bad side prevails as Cooper physically divides into separate entities. ("There are two Coops in there," according to Lynch.[4]) The bad Cooper escapes, while the good Cooper remains in the Lodge.

When Lynch turned his attention to *Fire Walk With Me* he continued to explore dual personalities and the struggle to keep negative impulses under control. In *Fire Walk With Me*, Laura does not face the threat of physical division but confronts her binary nature through a more complex, internal conflict between "good Laura" and "bad Laura," both of whom vie for dominance within the total persona known as "Laura Palmer."

A Building Crisis (One Laura)

When Laura's story begins, she acknowledges that she has already changed in some way. She tells her boyfriend, James Hurley, "I'm gone...long gone." Significantly, Laura refers to herself in the first person; she doesn't yet recognize that she has two opposite interior selves who struggle to control her behavior. Her bad side leads her to indulge in drugs (she snorts cocaine in the girl's bathroom at school), but her good side loves James and recognizes the goodness in him. At this point in the story, Laura's good side is strong and functions as an effective counter-balance to her darker nature.

Laura (Sheryl Lee) and James (James Marshall)

Later, Laura's best friend, Donna Hayward, reminds Laura of James's positive traits, referring to him as "the one" and someone who loves with "true love." Laura is uncomfortable with Donna's comments and dismisses them. Soon after, Donna poses a philosophical question to Laura: "Do you think that if you were falling in space you would slow down after a while or go faster and faster?" Laura responds, "Faster and faster. And for a long time you wouldn't feel anything. Then you would burst into fire...forever. And the angels wouldn't help you. Because they've all gone away."

Laura's despair is evident. Her comment about angels not helping reveals a hopeless state of mind. She believes that angels exist—but not for her. She has been abandoned; there is nothing good in her life (not even James). Laura is alone.

Despite this despair, Laura does not feel threatened, nor does she sense any urgent danger. Her hopelessness and despair comprise a pervasive sense on ennui in Laura. She is adrift (falling in space) and

[4] *Lynch on Lynch*, p. 183.

Bobby (Dana Ashbrook), Laura, and Donna (Moira Kelly)

will be "for a long time." Though Laura acknowledges a sense of loss (she doesn't "feel anything"), she chooses to ignore its causes. A passive figure, Laura accepts the pain in her life but so far shows no fear.

This all changes when Laura arrives home to discover that pages have been torn out of her diary. This crisis will propel the rest of the narrative. Laura recognizes, for perhaps the first time, the depths of violations she has suffered. The absence of the pages triggers a realization within Laura, made evident when, in panic, she rushes to tell her friend, Harold Smith, that Bob took the pages. (As established on the series, Smith was an agoraphobic shut-in whom Laura befriended during her Meals On Wheels work.) Interestingly, Harold insists that Bob is not real; he has known Laura for some time and, although she has evidently spoken of Bob in the past, she must have portrayed him as a figment of her imagination. But now Laura asserts that Bob is real, and this realization overwhelms her. She emphasizes again "He's real," then she elaborates: "He wants to be me...or he will kill me." Here, Laura finally admits to herself (and to Harold) the severity of the danger she is in. And, for a moment, Laura loses control. The evil in Laura surges through the crumbling façade of her denials, and she screams, "Fire walk with me" while her visage becomes that of the demonic.

This manifestation is short-lived, and the good within Laura re-establishes some presence. But Laura is scared. She knows that Bob is real, but she does not seem to know who he is. She either realizes that Bob masks himself in the identity of someone else, or she is retreating into another safe-haven of denial, postponing the devastating acknowledgement that Bob is, in fact, her father. But whether Laura knows Bob's identity or not, she cannot avoid the truth much longer.

> David Lynch [sought] to make Laura a complex, fully-realized character.

Laura is now critically destabilized. She's beginning to realize her dual nature. At home and in a daze, Laura hears the taunting voice of Bob demanding to "taste through [her]mouth." The film dissolves to an image of the Red Room curtains signifying that Laura's crisis is building. Her world is bleeding into another realm.

Agent Cooper senses this. The image of the red curtains dissolves back to Cooper in Philadelphia, where he describes Laura to Albert. He feels she will be the victim of the same murderer who killed Teresa Banks. He also tells Albert that Laura is "crying out for some help." Cooper is right to a certain extent. Laura is crying out—but only he can hear her. So far she has made ambiguous comments to Donna and James about her loss of identity and helplessness. She has explicitly sought help from Harold Smith, but only in the

German lobby card showing Laura with the Tremonds (Francis Bay and Jonathan J. Leppell)

task of hiding her diary. Laura's cries for help are muted in the physical world, but they ring loudly in the world of dreams and the subconscious—the realm of the Red Room. This is a world to which Cooper is tuned, and it is from there that he perceives her plight. (Again, see *WIP* 60.)

At the moment Cooper discusses Laura with Albert, the realm of the Red Room intersects with Laura's waking life. Outside the Double R Diner, Laura receives a visit from Mrs. Tremond and her grandson. These two characters appeared briefly in the series, where they were established as otherworldly beings. (They also made an appearance earlier in the film during the Deer Meadow "prologue," where they were again established as denizens of the Red Room.) The Tremonds give Laura a framed picture depicting a room with flowered wallpaper and a dark doorway in its corner. The grandson delivers a warning to Laura: "The man behind the mask is looking for the book with the pages torn out. He is going towards the hiding place. He is under the fan now." The line, "The man behind the mask" is important because it confirms to Laura that Bob hides his identity inside another.

> *Fire Walk With Me* explore[s] dual personalities and the struggle to keep negative impulses under control.

Frightened by the message, Laura rushes home, where she finds Bob searching for her diary behind her dresser. She flees the house in terror and hides behind a bush. Looking back, she sees her father, Leland Palmer, leave the house. In a moment of horrible clarity, Laura realizes that Bob may be her father. It is a sickening realization, a trauma that causes near physical pain. Laura is overcome by grief and collapses into sobs. (The script interestingly describes this as, "Laura is coming apart.")

Laura is now at her most vulnerable. Devastated beyond comprehension, she is susceptible to the darker side of her psyche (as she was at Harold's). Still, she denies what she's seen—what deep down she knows to be true. Somehow the good side of Laura rallies and keeps her focused long enough so she can seek solace in her best friend, Donna Hayward.

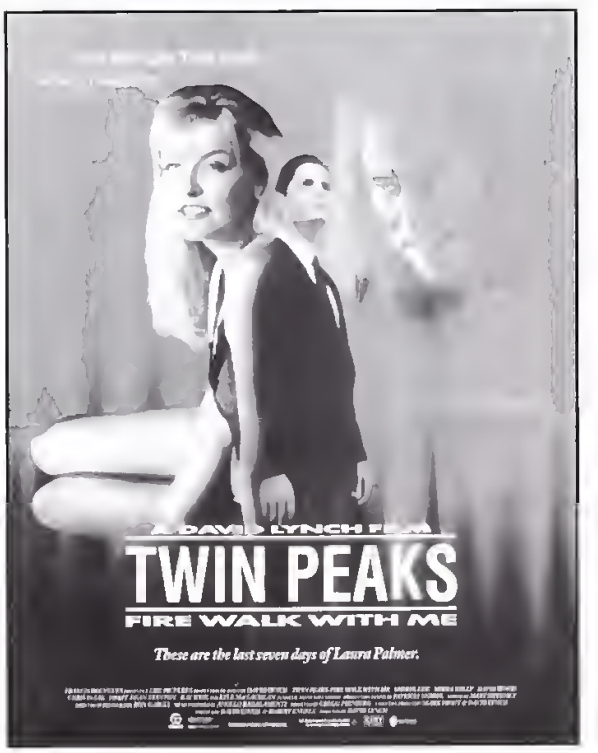
Donna is crucial to Laura. She is figure of goodness and purity, and she serves as a stabilizing influence in Laura's life. That is why Laura goes to her at this moment. Laura does not go to James or Harold (or even to her psychiatrist, Dr. Jacoby). She goes to Donna, because Donna loves her unconditionally. She needs to hear Donna say that she is Laura's best friend. (A deleted line from the script has Donna also say, "I'm your friend no matter what way you are." Even though this line is not spoken in the film, its meaning is still conveyed when Donna embraces Laura and says, "I'm your friend always.")

Laura returns home, but her trauma is renewed when an oppressive Leland confronts her at dinner. Intimidating her about her relationships, then insisting that she "wash her hands," Leland effectively reduces Laura to a child, someone who has no autonomy and no power. His physical presence is domineering, and his comment that "there's dirt way under this fingernail" batters her psychologically, imposing upon her his assertion that she is "dirty." Laura, here, is nothing but a victim.

Although *Fire Walk With Me* is about Laura, an important subplot in the film is the story of Leland Palmer. ("It [deals] with the torment in the father—the war in him."[5]) The television series reveals Leland to be a serial killer. He murdered Laura, Laura's cousin Maddy, and Teresa Banks (a young girl who was killed a year earlier and whose murder investigation is detailed during the film's first half hour). The series explains that Leland was possessed by the demonic Bob, but it never makes clear just how responsible Leland was for his crimes. It actually tries to have it both ways—to depict Leland as a victim (Cooper tells Sarah Palmer in episode 2010: "Leland did not do these things") and as a culprit (Cooper also believes Laura "forgave him," suggesting that Leland held some responsibility for his actions). The film muddies the issue further. Leland is given a motive for murdering Teresa (she tried to blackmail him), but he also behaves like a puppet under Bob's control. This latter characteristic is most evident after the dinner table scene. Leland sits on his bed in what appears to be a seething rage. Then the fury drains out of him, as if Bob has released the strings with which he manipulates Leland. Leland goes to Laura's room to tell her, "I love you. I love you so much."

Poor Laura is further traumatized. (According to the script, she "can hardly speak.") She knows that Leland's love is real, but she cannot deny the likely truth that Leland is Bob. In a moment of utter helplessness, Laura looks at a painting of an angel on her wall and asks, "Is it true?" Laura's appeal to a divine power marks the fall of the mental barriers she's been using as refuge. She can find no way to reconcile two truths—that her father loves her, and that her father is Bob. Laura looks to a source outside herself for answers but finds none. The truth is inside Laura, and it is horrible. Finding it impossible to view her father as a victimizer (and her herself as his victim), Laura places blame on herself. Laura has no other recourse at this point. In her mind her "bad" behavior must have caused her terrible situation.

Laura's "bad" side is now poised to take control. She has endured too many emotional and psychological blows (seeing Bob at the dresser, connecting his presence to Leland, being humiliated by her aggressive father, then feeling genuine love from a man who could quite literally be a monster) for her fragile psyche to remain intact. What's more, Laura views herself as so worthless that she is beyond salvation. Her angels have abandoned her. As a result, Laura retreats into passivity and self-doubt. Like other Lynch protagonists (Diane in *Mulholland Drive* and Henry in *Eraserhead*) Laura works against herself—her confusion and doubt entrap her.



Laura, like Agent Cooper in the final episode of *Twin Peaks*, is caught by her own flaws and uncertainty. She sees no way to break free and (like Cooper) her identity becomes fractured. In *Twin Peaks*, Cooper fails to keep his two selves intact, and his good side literally flees from its intolerable opposite. In *Fire Walk With Me*, Laura's good side cannot physically escape, but it can retreat into the deeper reaches of her mind much the way Henry in *Eraserhead* retreats into the mental fantasy world of the Lady in the Radiator. In effect, Laura's situation resembles a complex fusion of what happened to the Henry and Cooper characters: Laura's good side sinks into her psyche (*a la* Henry's escape), leaving her bad side on the surface (like Cooper).

This process is not sudden; it has only just begun. Laura's burgeoning bad side will find release while she sleeps, during a powerful, unsettling dream. After the dream, Laura's darker side will be dominant and her good side suppressed. (But her good side will neither be extinguished nor expunged. It will remain extant and, as we will see, potent.)

Laura's Dream (Division)

Laura dreams of the picture given to her by the Tremonds (the room with the door). Her point-of-view is inside the picture, moving through the open door. She sees Mrs. Tremond beckon her further in; she sees the grandson who snaps his fingers, effectively placing Laura in the Red Room. There, she sees the Owl Cave ring on a table. Agent Cooper enters the room. The Little Man From Another Place asks Cooper, "Do you know who I am?" Then he identifies himself as "the arm" and makes a "whooping" noise. The Little Man picks up the ring and holds it toward Laura (her point-of-view). Cooper turns toward "Laura" and says, "Don't take the ring...Laura, don't take the ring." At this point, Laura seems to wake up. She is in her bed. She turns to look at her bedroom door and discovers she cannot move her left arm. Laura sees a bloody Annie Blackburne in her bed. Annie identifies herself and says, "I've been with Laura and Dale. The good Dale is in the Lodge, and he can't leave. Write it in your diary." Laura looks at her door again, and when she turns back, Annie is gone. Laura realizes she is clutching something in her numb hand. She opens it and sees the Owl Cave

[5]Ibid, p. 185.

ring. She is horrified. She becomes distracted by a noise outside her room (the distorted sound of her name being called). She opens her door to look out on a dark, empty hall. She looks back at the Tremond's picture and sees herself in the picture standing in the doorway. A close-up of this second Laura reveals a look of loss and sadness on her face, as if she no longer knows who she is. At this point the dream truly ends, and Laura wakes up.

Laura's dream is possibly the most important sequence in the film. Dreams have always been a significant element of Lynch's work. Through dreams Lynch has the freedom to explore the inner workings of his characters' minds. Dreams are of particular importance in the *Twin Peaks* universe because they provide access to the mysterious world of the Red Room. This "free zone" (as Lynch describes it[6]) is a place that reflects the consciousness of the person who enters ("It changes depending on whoever walks into it"[7]). It is a place of transformation, as is obvious from the *Twin Peaks* finale. It is also a place where the buried or concealed aspects of a person's subconscious are made manifest; those who are vulnerable or unprepared for what they encounter in the Red Room can be psychologically wounded as a result of their "visit."

The Little Man (Michael J. Anderson) and Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan)

Laura dreams.

Laura journeys into her dream in a state of doubt and hopelessness. The Little Man (or "arm") holds the ring before her as she hears Cooper's warning. Laura "wakes" from this part of the dream to discover her left arm is now paralyzed and, like the "arm" in the dream, it holds the ring. Laura is not shown physically taking the ring, but in her weakened, passive state she is vulnerable to it. She either acquiesces to the ring, or, more likely, it is imposed upon her. Either way, she makes no deliberate effort to take it—when the Little Man picks it up, Laura receives it.

The film so far has established the ring as a dangerous thing. But its exact nature is ambiguous. Earlier in the film, the Little Man talks about the ring with Bob, and the ring is linked with Teresa Banks's murder. Bob is said to have "fell a victim," and the Little Man says, "With this ring, I thee wed." Ownership of the ring apparently marks a person as Bob's victim, but only if the Little Man "weds" Bob to his prey. Teresa had the ring for some time, and her arm was reportedly numb, implying that she, too, somehow accepted the ring from the Little Man.

The ring seems to be an object of power that can do great harm if wielded by a malevolent entity. The Little Man forces the ring on those too vulnerable to resist. Using the ring, he binds his victims. He entraps them. Cooper senses this and wisely warns Laura not to take the ring. What Cooper really wants is for Laura to resist the ring, to turn away from it. And, arguably, Laura does not "take" the ring. It is thrust upon her. Given her mental state, she has little strength to refuse it.

Accepting the ring in the dream results in a kind of danger for Laura different from receiving it in the waking world. Once Laura is given the ring, her psyche shifts balance, and her good side is ensnared. Annie Blackburne hints at Laura's situation when she explains that there is a "good" Dale who has also become trapped. Like Cooper, Laura's good side is caught. Shortly after Laura receives the ring, she sees herself in the Tremond's picture—a signal that the good side of Laura is now locked deep in her subconscious. (The good side has not been eliminated, merely muted by the Owl Cave ring and banished to the recesses of her mind.)

Laura's journey in and out of her dream

[6]Ibid., p. 19.

[7]Lynch quoted in Martha Nochimson, *The Passion of David Lynch: Wild at Heart in Hollywood* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), p. 251.

(and the Red Room) is a damaging experience. Other critics, however, regard Laura's dream as one of positive transformation. Martha Nochimson, who has written the most insightful analysis of *Fire Walk With Me* so far, argues that two Laura's emerge from the dream—a wounded Laura (the one at her bedroom door) and a "visionary" Laura (the one in the painting). After her dream, "wounded" Laura has the ability to free herself and become visionary. In this way she is able to perceive deeper truths. She will know when Donna is in danger, recognize the true identity of Bob, and understand the liberating power of the Owl Cave ring.

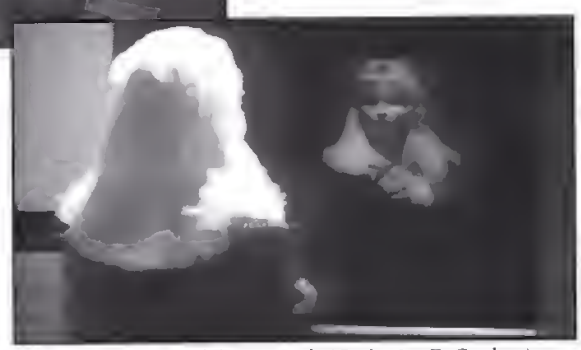
It can be argued, however, that Laura has always been visionary, hence her ability to see Bob and the Tremonds in the first place. What's more, the "visionary" Laura whom Nochimson identifies in the painting is a forlorn figure, one who appears bewildered and despairing rather than someone who has "acquired the hopeful power of the subconscious."[8]

It is true that the Laura who wakes from her dream is a different person from the one who fell asleep. But it is a darker Laura who emerges, not a "visionary" one. Unencumbered by her good side, the bad Laura boldly asserts herself. The first time we see her after the dream, she is dressed provocatively and preparing to go out and prostitute herself. This post-dream Laura is clearly not a positive figure. She is dangerous and frightening.[9]

Choosing Between Two Lauras

Donna arrives at Laura's house and is startled by Laura's appearance. Laura brushes her off, showing a marked difference in her behavior from what she did a day earlier when she sought Donna for solace and support. Donna reminds Laura that she is her best friend—the same declaration that Laura so desperately needed to hear the day before. Today, the words have no meaning. Laura discards Donna without a second glance and leaves the house.

Laura arrives at the Roadhouse. Before she enters, however, she is startled by the appearance of the Log Lady (who somehow knows to be there). The Log Lady delivers an important message: "When this kind of fire starts, it is very hard to put out. The tender boughs of innocence burn first and the wind rises—then all goodness is in jeopardy."



Top: Laura and the Log Lady (Catherine E. Coulson)

The Log Lady plays a crucial role at this juncture. Her presence counters the appearance of the Little Man and the effects of the Owl Cave ring. Her admonition that it is hard to put out "this kind" of fire alerts Laura to the consuming presence of her darker side. The Log Lady essentially tells Laura that her good side is in jeopardy should she continue on her present course. More than simply provide a warning, the Log Lady attempts to steer Laura back in the "right" direction. In effect, she frees the good Laura from her confinement within Laura's mind. Laura is now able to perceive the two selves within her. This development is emphasized when Laura turns to see her reflection in the Roadhouse door. Once again, two Laura's appear on-screen, recalling the dream sequence in which Laura sees herself in the painting. This time, however, Laura's reflection signals liberation rather than entrapment.

Only Cooper can hear Laura's cries for help.

The darker Laura is weakened, her determination partially diffused by the reawakened good side. Laura is obviously affected by the new shift in her psychological balance and is now in a position where she can choose either to indulge her bad side or empower her good. She has become the "two people" that Dr. Jacoby perceived.

Laura sits at a table in the Roadhouse. Emotions wash over her, and she breaks down crying. Until this moment, Laura could not perceive the distinction between her two selves; she was simply one Laura who had a single path in life. Now, she must decide which of her two personalities will have control. But Laura has convinced herself that she has been abandoned and that her situation is hopeless. Her feelings of indecision and loss are underscored by the words Julee Cruise sings on the Roadhouse stage: "Why did you go? Why did you turn away from me? Was it me? Was it you? Questions in a world of blue."

Laura chooses. She takes the path of least resistance. She gives a nod to Jacques Renault at the bar, signaling that she is ready to sell herself to men. Her darker nature has prevailed.

Two truckers arrive at her table and give her money. Laura is angry, however. She knows her bad side is strong and winning, and she lashes out at the men, physically accosting them. Like a caged animal, Laura is frightened and hostile. She threatens those who, beyond her bars, would taunt and mistreat her. As long as Laura allows her dark side to hold sway, however, she is helpless to break free and save herself.

Laura resigns herself to the situation

[8]Ibid., 188

[9]In the script, the first scene following the dream shows Laura meeting James outside her house the next morning. James asks Laura where she was the previous night and says, "We were supposed to be together." Laura responds, "How can I be together when I'm not together?" This odd remark reinforces the divided nature of Laura's psyche and speaks to Lynch's intent regarding Laura's dream. (An edited version of this James/Laura scene was moved to a later point in the film, immediately following her drug buy with Bobby.)

when Donna arrives at the table. Disgusted by the effortless goodness in Donna, Laura's bad side secures control. She allows her anger to spill over against Donna, targeting her friend and calling Donna's bluff to come with Laura and her two "Johns." Laura knows what dark passages they are about to tread, but she allows her innocent friend to come along anyway.

For the first time, Laura is poised to hurt another. So far, Laura has hurt only herself when she has been "bad." If she were purposefully and seriously to hurt someone else, however, her good side would be irretrievably lost and her bad side victorious. This is what Bob wants. This is what Bob (and his ally, the Little Man) have been driving Laura toward.

In the cosmology of David Lynch films, violence against another irrevocably leads to doom for the perpetrator. In *Eraserhead*, Henry stabs the baby and suffers a mental collapse, retreating into his mind to escape the horror he caused. In *Lost Highway*, Fred Madison kills his wife and seems damned to retreat forever on an endless nighttime road—a "lost highway." In *Mulholland Drive*, an envious Diane hires a hitman to kill her perceived rival (and ex-lover), Camilla. As soon as she commits to the killing, she literally sells her soul to the malevolent derelict behind the restaurant. (Diane faces a "go/no-go" choice when the hitman informs her, "Once you hand this [money] over, it's a done deal." When he asks, "You sure you want this?" she replies, "More than anything.") In *Blue Velvet*, Jeffrey suffers lesser, but still dire, consequences when he submits to Dorothy's pleas to "hurt" her. Shortly after slapping Dorothy, Jeffrey meets the evil Frank Booth. What follows is Jeffrey's short-lived journey down a hellish "lost highway" of his own. He suffers humiliation and torture at the hand of Frank, who reminds Jeffrey, "You're just like me." (This is a critical line because, as David Foster Wallace explains, Frank is one of Lynch's "bad guys"—characters who are "exultant, orgasmic, most fully present at their evilest moments: . . . they have yielded themselves up to a darkness way bigger than any one person."[10] By hurting Dorothy, Jeffrey, too, yields himself to a darkness bigger than himself and, in a sense, he becomes "just like Frank.")

Time and again Lynch posits that negative or hurtful actions against another lead to damnation. The demonic Bob wants to be Laura, but he cannot fully possess her until she hurts someone else. Bob and his associates have slowly weakened Laura's psychological defenses, setting her off-balance and positioning her to take the rage and hate she feels against herself and unleash them upon another.

Laura is about to do just that. She has brought Donna into her frightening world as the two girls and the truckers travel to "Partyland," a seedy bar described in the script as a "border truck stop" between Canada and the United States. Identified as the "Pink Room" on the *Fire Walk With Me* soundtrack, Partyland arguably represents a real-world (or waking-world) version of the Red Room—a place that literally straddles borders. As such, Partyland threatens to be another of Lynch's "free zones." It is a dangerous place, especially for the unprepared Donna. Laura watches as Buck, one of the truckers, drugs Donna's beer. Aware of its danger, Laura still encourages Donna to drink. ("Hey, Donna, chug-a-lug.") Laura has now participated in hurting another.

Once Donna is drugged, she withdraws from the scene. At the same time, Ronette Pulaski replaces Donna at Laura's side. Ronette is an associate of Laura's, a dark-haired girl who, like Laura, has participated in prostitution. As such, she functions as a counterpart to Donna: a darker, corrupted version of Laura's friend. It is significant that her first appearance is here in the Pink Room. In this real-world version of the Red Room, Ronette is not unlike

[10]David Foster Wallace, "David Lynch Keeps His Head," in *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1997), p. 204.

Donna's doppelganger—her shadow-self (to use a term from the series). Laura ostensibly exchanges Donna for Ronette and, in a drug-addled haze, blissfully forgets the harm she has caused her "best friend."

Ronette's connection to Donna is reinforced when she later spies Donna in a dangerous situation and alerts Laura. Ronette essentially "reconnects" Laura with Donna. Once she serves this function, she is no longer necessary to the scene. Donna's presence reasserts itself in Laura's life, and Ronette seemingly fades away.

Laura sees that an oblivious Donna has become vulnerable to the predatory sexual advances of Tommy (the other trucker), and all her instincts of goodness and friendship resurface. A bright white light illuminates Laura, signaling the resurgence of Laura's good side. Laura panics at the imminent threat to Donna and, rather than allow her to come to any further harm (as Laura's darker side—and Bob—would like), she acts to save her friend.

Nochimson argues that the bright light that bathes Laura's face "makes her aware" of the threat to Donna: "Shocked into action visionary Laura finds the power to protect Donna."[11] Nochimson's analysis implies that a force outside Laura brings Donna's plight to her attention. This is possible, though the identity of this force is never defined. Still, this is a curious scene. Until this point of (literal) illumination Laura is unaware or doesn't care about Donna. When she actually sees Donna on the threshold of rape—a true, lasting injury, the kind which may damage Donna beyond repair—Laura, whose potent "good" side is still a vital aspect of her psyche (and her soul), acts to save her friend. This action, this awareness, comes from Laura, not some outside force.

The Log Lady's earlier warning implies that Laura has the power of choice. She says, "When this kind of fire starts *it is very hard to put out.*" The message? "You have the ability to extinguish this fire. It won't be easy. But you can *choose* to put it out if you desire."

Why else would the Log Lady deliver this message if not to inform Laura she still had the power to change her fate? This message has been ringing in Laura's subconscious the entire night. She has been sorting the Log Lady's words, making sense of them. In a desperate moment of clarity (arguably the white light) Laura understands the Log Lady's warning.

A darker Laura has emerged from her dream.

The Log Lady's words are doubly significant when Laura sees that Donna's "tender boughs of innocence" are burning, that Donna's "goodness is in jeopardy." She recognizes that Donna is succumbing to the same dark impulses that are consuming Laura. But her "good" side will not allow it; "Laura" chooses to do the right thing and rescues Donna.

It is also arguable that Laura has come close to "possessing" Donna in the way Bob has sought to possess Laura. Bob's evil is attempting to infest Laura, to occupy her very being. Laura better understands this danger when she realizes she has made Donna *her* victim. A deleted line of dialogue has Bob telling Laura, "See what *we* can do to Donna?" [Emphasis added.] Bob's use of the plural "we" confirms that Laura is complicit in the harm she has caused Donna. Laura hurt her friend. *She* was responsible. Laura also comes to understand that her "evil" is potentially contagious. She castigates Donna, telling her, "Don't ever wear my stuff," essentially warning Donna not to envelop herself in Laura's "fabric." (Another deleted line supports this idea: the script has Laura later telling Donna, "All my things have me in them. I don't want you to be like me.")

Confidence and Over-confidence

Her raucous night over, a quiet morning and gentle conversation with Donna helps Laura to regain some composure. She is fragile, however. Her talk with Donna is strained, and although her good side has been freed, Laura is still damaged

[11]Nochimson, p. 188.

from her dream two nights earlier.

Laura is under assault by forces beyond her understanding. These forces have so far manifested themselves as Bob, the Little Man, and possibly the Tremonds. They sense weakness in Laura and capitalize on it as they attempt to de-stabilize her fragile psyche. But Laura has just survived a grueling test of her conscience and has emerged a stronger character.

After Leland picks up Laura at Donna's home, he and Laura are accosted by yet another mysterious being, Mike, the One Armed Man—who drives up beside them and, in a cacophony of revving engines, horns, and screams, attempts to warn Laura: "It's your father!" and cryptically threaten Leland: "The thread will be torn, Mr. Palmer!"

This unsettling encounter scares Laura and Leland both, releasing disturbing and uncomfortable memories in each. Anger, fear, and confusion course through Laura and, for the first time, she cautiously questions Leland about his secret, asking if he had been home "during the day" last week. This question shows Laura at last willing to explore a potentially harsh truth. Early in the film Laura was a passive figure, resigned to a life of loss and despair. Now, bolstered by the increasing strength of her good side (and her choice to do good in the Pink Room—to tamp down "that kind of fire"), she challenges Leland, someone who wielded such oppressive authority over her just a few days earlier.

Later, at home, a bolder, more aggressive Laura is further evident as she pieces together the Owl Cave ring puzzle, recalling the instances in which she has seen the ring (on the One Armed Man, held by the Little Man and, most importantly, on Teresa Banks). Laura has been actively sorting through her memories and experiences—much different behavior from that of the passive, oblivious Laura a few days earlier.[12] When a bright light interrupts her thoughts, Laura looks up, angry. Addressing an unseen Bob, Laura demands to know, "Who are you? Who are you, really?" Significantly, Laura does not cower; she does not retreat the way she did when she saw Bob at her dresser. This Laura is forceful. She is on the threshold of taking control of her life.

Bobby and Laura

But confidence leads to over-confidence and maybe even foolishness. Laura returns to an over-indulgent use of drugs, a dependence and habit she is not yet strong enough to break. Because Laura's life frequently dissolves into repetitive behaviors, it's easy for Bob to wait until Laura's new-found confidence is weakened by her addictions. Her habits are all part of Bob's plan to chip away at her resolve.

Buoyed by a new drug-induced high, Laura and Bobby rendezvous late at night with a drug dealer (Deputy Cliff, from the film's prologue). The deal goes bad, and Bobby shoots and kills the dealer. But Laura is only briefly startled. She laughs at the outcome. Then, in a drug-induced misinterpretation of identity, Laura confuses the dealer for Bobby's friend, Mike. "You killed Mike," she insists, causing Bobby also to wonder at the identity of the victim. Although Laura's mind is muddled, she shows little, if any, fear in face of such a horrific act. Laura is detached from the event. She takes on a mock-superior tone with Bobby, chastising him for what he's done. Laura then giggles dismissively at the whole thing as if she is psychologically and emotionally immune to the sudden death of another human being.

Devastation

Laura's return to drug use shows that she is weak despite her surface confidence. She still seeks escape from the psychic wounds inflicted upon her during the dream and the hard realities she has faced in the waking world. (James realizes Laura is "on something again" when he visits her outside her house the next morning.)

Still, Laura has exhibited more strength

[12]It is unclear what, if any, conclusions Laura comes to about the ring. An argument could be made that she now suspects Leland of Teresa Banks's murder. Earlier, at Partyland, Ronette remarks about Teresa's death and potential blackmail scheme. Jacques then remembers that Teresa asked him about Laura's and Ronette's fathers, which startles Laura. Knowing that Teresa was killed and then hearing the One Armed Man say, "It's your father!" could lead Laura to the conclusion that Leland killed Teresa.

than usual, and this has likely alarmed Bob and his associates, who have so far not succeeded at weakening Laura. (As the dying Leland confirmed in episode 2009 of the series, "Laura was strong. She fought them. She wouldn't let them win.") None of their tactics has worked: the appearance of Bob at the dresser, the appearance of the ring and her dual self in the dream, the harm inflicted on Donna in the Pink Room. Laura has overcome each one of these psychic blows. Now, as Laura becomes increasingly determined to resist Bob's various violations, she must face the most horrific shock of all. And for this she is woefully unprepared.

Leland (as Bob) drugs Sarah Palmer in order to mask his movements. Laura snorts cocaine and goes to sleep. Bob then enters Laura's room and begins to rape her.

Laura is again in a drug-induced haze. Part of her responds to Bob's sexual advances. Another part resists, seeking again and again to know: "Who are you?" Laura struggles for a truth that seems too elusive to grasp. Bob's "identity" continually slips away from her vision. She literally grabs Bob's face in an attempt to hold it still long enough to see its true nature. Finally, she does. The script describes the revelation as, "Slowly, what she always knew deep inside of her becomes clear. BOB BECOMES LELAND." When he does—when Laura finally recognizes that her father has been abusing her for so many years—she screams in terror and the screen goes black, implying (and the script confirms) that she has passed out.

How did Laura come to this critical point in her life? Why does she learn the truth about Leland/Bob at this moment?

One common supposition about this scene is that there is no particular reason for Laura to make the discovery now—she just does. Many serious reviewers of the film assume that Laura happens to learn Bob's identity as if by accident. These reviewers are handicapped by the knowledge of the series—they already know Laura will learn Bob's identity and are not surprised when she does. There is no revelation for them. (As a result, these viewers make fewer demands of *Fire Walk With Me* than they might another film. They are satisfied as long as *Fire Walk With Me* shows them story events they already know.)

This kind of viewer fails to anchor Laura's discovery to the structure of her story and fails to credit Lynch and Engels for constructing a narrative that logically leads to this specific revelatory moment.

In point of fact, Laura learns Bob's identity because Bob wants her to. He needs to wound her like never before. He needs to ruin her, to sap her of all her will, to leave her senseless and vulnerable. That is why he comes to her now. He must hurt her before she can grow stronger.

Not everyone sees the scene this way. Many astute reviewers recognize the importance of the scene but choose to interpret it differently. They suggest that by this point in the story Laura has found the capacity to discern Bob's identity. Martha Nochimson argues that Laura's dream gave her visionary power "to discover Bob's true identity when he next invades her room."[13] This is a robust theory because it identifies Laura as an active character, one who is driving her own story. But it still fails to explain why Bob's identity is revealed at this moment in the story. Why did Laura's visionary power not work earlier? (After all, she was in the car with Leland and suspected the truth. Yet she still didn't see Leland as Bob.) Nochimson might argue that Laura needs to be in the physical presence of Bob-as-Leland, not simply Leland himself. Once Bob (as Leland) comes to Laura's room, she sees his true identity.

> Laura journeys into her dream in a state of doubt and hopelessness....A darker Laura emerges.

Nochimson's argument provides a valuable way to view the post-dream Laura, but the "visionary" theory still remains suspect. Since her dream, Laura has faced the other-worldly bright light and failed to determine his (or its) identity. What's more, a visionary Laura is hard to reconcile with a Laura who so easily mistook the identity of Bobby's gun-shot victim. Why did she so readily perceive the drug-dealing deputy as Bobby's friend, Mike? Why do her supposed powers of perception fail her? These questions pose serious challenges to the idea of a visionary Laura.

Lynch critic John Alexander offers one explanation for Laura's misperceptions about Bob/Leland: although Bob and Leland are "obviously one and the same person...Laura denies the truth, choosing to live in self-manifested illusion."[14] In other words, Laura is preventing herself from learning the truth because "what she always knew deep inside her" is too horrible to accept. This is evident from Laura's reaction to the truth. The fact that Bob is Leland devastates her. She passes out and then spends the next day in numb shock: "Laura's perception of reality dissolves into vagaries—school is a daze of dutch angles and blurred images. The monster of her dreams has erupted forth into her waking life, to drag her down into the underworld."[15]

If Laura's powers of sight allow her at last to pierce the mask of her oppressor—to see his true face—why does she collapse into ruin once she does? Has the truth helped her? Has it freed her? No. The truth about Bob debilitates Laura; it does not empower her. She finds herself adrift in a distorted world of pain and despair. Laura has not escaped Bob; rather, she has become further victimized by him.

This was Bob's intent. He chose to reveal himself to Laura; she did not discover the truth on her own. To be sure, Laura (or at least part of her) was desperate to find out who Bob was. But the scene is scripted and shot so as to make it uncertain whether Laura arrives at the truth or whether it is delivered to her. The script explains, "Bob *becomes* Leland" the truth "*becomes* clear." This use of passive voice mitigates any action by Laura (she does not "discover" or "unmask" Bob, or participate in any other active way at learning the truth). Lynch shoots the scene with deliberate obfuscation. In dream-like agony, Laura struggles to make herself aware—to stay in the moment and to "see" who Bob is. But she loses her focus, acquiescing to the drugs and sensations of her body. The figure above her seems to oscillate between Bob and Leland. At the last moment, Laura sees Leland on top of her, and she screams.

Lynch renders the scene this way because he wants to convey the idea that although Laura seeks the truth, she is also

[13]Ibid., 189.

[14]John Alexander, *The Films of David Lynch* (London: Charles Letts and Co. Limited, 1993), p. 140.

[15]Ibid.

afraid of it. As Alexander notes, Laura has always known the truth but has always denied it. Bob capitalizes on this uncertainty. He allows Laura to see his other face because he knows it will destroy her growing confidence and control. It will leave her helpless to his psychic advances and his goal to be her—to taste through her mouth.

Bob is the active agent in this scene. He imposes the truth upon Laura so that it will irrevocably destabilize her. In this way Bob resembles Bobby Peru from Lynch's previous film, *Wild At Heart*. Just as Bob preys upon Laura, Bobby Peru targets Lula, another young woman in denial. Peru visits Lula in her motel room where he cruelly victimizes her. Like Bob, he forces himself upon Lula; and while he does not go so far as to physically rape her, he effectively does so verbally. Peru seeks to ruin Lula, to leave her powerless. His verbal and physical assault succeeds: "Lula is so defeated by being victimized this way that, when she realizes that Sailor [her boyfriend] is also in danger of becoming Peru's victim, she cannot summon the energy to aid him."[16]

Lula, like Laura, is resistant to Peru at first—she pushes him away and tries to stop his advances. But when Lula gives in to the sensations Peru evokes from her body, her resistance breaks down, and she acquiesces to his demands. Once she does, Lula is forced to realize a truth about herself that she has long denied—that she enjoys a reckless, promiscuous life. This truth cripples Lula—Peru's intent all along. According to Lynch, what Peru did "pointed out that Lula plays tricks on herself, like we all do. She blocks out many parts of reality so she can still continue to be Lula."[17]

> [Laura] must decide which of her two personalities will have control.

Laura, too, has blocked out parts of reality. She has always known the truth about Bob, but she has successfully suppressed it so she can go about her everyday life. Knowing that Laura "blocks out reality," Bob forces her to see behind her self-imposed barriers. He makes her see Leland as Bob. The effect is overwhelming, and Laura crumbles.

The next morning Laura can hardly lift her head at the breakfast table. She tries to crawl inside herself to escape the harshness of a now undeniable reality. Leland innocently questions her, and Laura leaves the table. He pursues her, and Laura turns on him, hissing the words, "Stay away from me." She still has her anger and some sense of self-preservation, but she is a defeated character.

The Last Day (Choosing Again)

This defeat is evident throughout Laura's last day. The walk to school is painful. The real world seems foreign as it spins and tilts away. Laura has become disconnected from reality—time seems to race forward and backward. As she sits in school, her world shifts and blurs, and Laura is powerless. Beaten, she dissolves into sobs.

To facilitate some kind of escape from this hellish waking-world, Laura seeks drugs from Bobby. She returns home and prepares to go out and meet Leo Johnson and Jacques Renault—hard men, the kind to whom Laura submits in times of greatest depression. She dresses promiscuously and snorts her cocaine.

All traces of self-esteem are gone. This loss is reinforced when Laura looks at her angel painting and, to her horror, sees the angel fade from the picture and completely disappear. Laura's abandonment is confirmed. Her angels have gone, and her prediction that they will not help her has come true.

The fading angel represents a collapse of Laura's good side. Once again she has allowed her darker, self-abusing, self-loathing side to gain control. This is the Laura that Bob is seeking. This is the Laura that he can control and ultimately possess.

It is a dark Laura who later meets with James. When he tries to kiss her, she succumbs at first, then pushes him away and finally turns on him. She hits James and says she pities him. James does not back down. Instinctively, he knows she needs help, and he tries to reach past her self-imposed barrier and connect with the Laura he loves. Quite possibly, James succeeds. Deep down, Laura's good self is aware of James's efforts. Detached and resigned, however, Laura merely despairs at the growing strength of her darker side.

In fact, she reluctantly acknowledges the victory of her dark self when she says to James, "You don't know me...Your Laura disappeared. It's just me now." This dialogue significantly contrasts with Laura's earlier exchange with James at the school. There, despite her sense of loss, she referred to herself solely in the first person. Now, she uses both first and third. Although her good self briefly flickers into existence, valiantly saying, "I love you!" to James as she jumps off his bike,[18] "Laura" chooses to allow her bad self to take control. "That kind of fire" is burning again, and Laura makes no effort to put it out.

Once again, Laura plummets into a world of indulgence and abuse. She makes her rendezvous with Jacques, Leo, and Ronette at Jacques' cabin deep in the woods. There, she engages in an orgy of intoxicants and brutal sex. Leland/Bob follows to observe. When he stares through the cabin window, Laura is once again bathed in white light. But this light does not bring the power of vision or escape; rather it brings a reminder to Laura of Bob's inescapable power.

Death and Salvation in the Train Car (Laura's Final Choice)

Time passes. Laura and Ronette are bound and left in the cabin. Leland enters and gathers up the girls. He marches them into the woods toward an abandoned train car deep in the forest.

Does Bob plan on killing the girls at this point? If so, why take them to the train car? Why not just do the deed in the cabin? And finally, why does he need to take *both* girls?

Once again, Bob is the active agent here. He is following through on the plan he set into motion when he revealed himself to Laura the night before. Possessing Laura is his goal and now, in this all-or-nothing moment, he brings Laura to a specific place where he can perform the ritual required for him to achieve this goal. The ritual requires him to bind Laura's hands behind her back and place her above a mirror. Here, so close to Glastonbury

[16]Nochimson, p. 158.

[17]David Breskin, Interview with David Lynch in *Inner Views* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p. 86,

[18]The script confirms the weakened presence of Laura's good side by describing her scream of "I love you!" as coming "from far away," even though Laura is only inches from James.

Leo (Eric Da Re), Laura, Ronette (Phoebe Augustine), and Jacques (Walter Olkewicz)

Grove—the gateway to the Red Room/ Black Lodge—Bob intends on finally "taking" Laura. He is not expecting to kill her. Not now. Not unless he has too.

His reasons for bringing Ronette along are less clear. The series provides few details about what happened to Ronette the night Laura was murdered. We know she was with Laura in the train car and that she saw Bob. According to Agent Cooper in episode 2001 (directed and co-written by Lynch), "Using a blunt object [Bob] hit Ronette and knocked her unconscious. He must have been so intent on killing Laura he didn't realize Ronette regained consciousness and escaped." But this still doesn't explain why Leland/Bob would bring Ronette along. She was not Bob's target, and as a witness to his crimes she would have to be killed (something Bob may have attempted in episode 2003). So why didn't Bob simply kill Ronette in the cabin?

At the time the series was written, Ronette was an incidental character, and her presence with Laura the night of the murder was explained as happenstance. Naturally, Ronette's presence could not be overlooked in the film. Surprisingly, Ronette's role in *Fire Walk With Me* is given more meaning than the series ever hinted.

Earlier, a tenuous connection was made between Ronette and Donna Hayward. Ronette and Donna are parallel figures in Laura's life; they are counterparts. Donna functions as the friend of "good" Laura, Ronette as the friend of "bad" Laura. Significantly, Ronette was introduced in the Pink Room, emerging from the shadows just as Donna withdrew into the darkness. In this way Ronette represents the perverted Donna—the kind of character Donna might have become if she had continued to wear "Laura's stuff."

A darker Laura came close to harming Donna, but the good Laura asserted herself and rescued her friend. Now, inside the train car, the presence of Ronette provides another potential victim—not for Bob, but for Laura. If Laura is made to kill Ronette, she will have forever abandoned her good side and, like Leland, have irrevocably given control to Bob.

And Laura's transformation into Bob begins. Horrified, she looks into the mirror she sees Bob's reflection staring back. The process is underway. Bob's plan is succeeding and Laura, so lost and broken, is losing control. She is opening herself to the ultimate violation.

Suddenly, there is a moment of hope. It comes from Ronette, of all people. Ronette, the perverted Donna—a girl no better than Laura at her worst, someone who has sunk to the same depths of depravity, shame, and abuse ("Here we go again," Ronette exclaims to Laura as they surrender to sexual excess in the Pink Room)—Ronette Pulaski begins to pray, and her prayers are answered.

An angel appears above Ronette, its presence made known by a bright white light and a sudden silence. The angel brings with her a sense of calm and protection. The horror of the events in the train car—the screaming and the torture—are cancelled out, an effect Lynch accomplishes by dropping the pulsing music and sound effects. Ronette looks up at the angel and realizes her prayers have been heard. She has asked for forgiveness ("I'm sorry. I'm sorry."), and after she does her bound hands are freed.

Laura sees all this and realizes that salvation is possible. She now knows a truth even deeper than the reality of Bob's identity—she knows she was wrong about the angels. Having blamed herself for her horrific misfortunes, Laura felt she didn't deserve angels. She turned away from them, convincing herself that it was *they*

who had abandoned *her*. She then chose to let her good side disappear, to let the fire consume her. Bob made every effort to push her toward this choice—he abused her, victimized her, stripped her of her self-esteem so that Laura would feel unworthy of angels. But Ronette's angel proves to Laura that she, too, is a good person, and that the angels have never left. In this moment, her strength returns, and her ability to resist Bob is assured.

It is also at this moment that the Owl Cave ring finds its way to Laura. The One Armed Man arrives outside the train car and, with the help of Ronette, manages to slide open the door. Leland/Bob reacts, throwing Ronette out and closing the door—but not before the ring leaves the One Armed Man and rolls across the floor. Laura sees it, and with her new-found strength and understanding that the angels are near, puts it on. The result is a Lynchian moment of power unleashed, a moment akin to when Henry stabs the baby in *Eraserhead*, "setting in motion a flow of forces."[19] Leland screams, the Little Man shudders, static electricity floods the frame. Leland, forced by Bob into action, screams, "Don't make me do this!" and plunges a knife into Laura again and again until she is dead.

What happened here in this sudden few seconds? Why does Laura dare to put the ring on when she has been so explicitly warned against it?

Laura Palmer has chosen good over evil. Once she does, the Owl Cave ring poses no threat to her. It cannot ensnare her, nor can it enslave her. Significantly, the ring has not been imposed upon her by another being. The Little Man has not "wed" Laura with it, and although the One Armed Man may have thrown the ring into the train car, he does not force Laura to take it.[20] The ring is not placed on Laura's finger; it comes to her at a moment when she can choose to put it on.

Laura did not have this freedom of choice in her dream. There, the Little Man held the ring out to Laura, who later found it clutched in her hand. Weakened by the machinations of Bob, she was too vulnerable to resist. Cooper, who had sensed Laura's weakened state and her "cries for help," was wise to warn her against the ring. He recognized the threat of the Little Man, and he hoped Laura would be strong enough to turn away.

The ring is clearly an object of power. If wielded by malevolent entities it can do great harm. But if held by a person of goodness (as is Laura when she takes it) it might become an object of beneficence. Robert Engels (co-writer of *Fire Walk With Me*) explains that the ring can be both good and bad depending on who has it: "For [some] people it empowers them."[21] Laura knows she cannot escape death, but she also knows she has overcome her self-doubt. She boldly takes the ring—this object of power—and fearlessly puts it on. Perhaps she knows this action will force Bob to kill her. If so, she faces death with bravery and a certainty in her own goodness.

Laura has seen Ronette's angel sever Ronette's bonds. The ring appears soon after the appearance of the angel, and Laura's hands, too, are suddenly free. Laura must know that the ring and angels are somehow connected.[22] Realizing all this with sudden clarity, Laura embraces the potential of the ring. It cannot harm her; it can only "empower" her. This is why the Little Man is suddenly so afraid; Laura has turned the tables—she has wrested power away from him and Bob. Laura's choice does more than save her, it gives her victory over Bob and his associates. Laura has stolen their greatest weapon.

But an empowered Laura represents a threat. Bob knows Laura cannot be allowed to possess the ring any longer than she already has. She must be killed. Once Bob kills her, however, the ring is lost. Bob/Leland is not shown removing the ring from Laura's finger, and we know that it did not remain with her corpse. What's more, the ring does not appear again in the film—either with Laura in the Red Room, or with the One Armed Man, the Little Man, or Bob. Arguably, Laura has removed it from the playing field.

Laura's death brings her to her own Red Room, where she sits confused and dazed. Her ordeal still resonates, and the consciousness of her afterlife (her soul, if you will) is befuddled. Laura has left her world—but not through easy means. She has endured a brutal death, and upon "awakening" in this new place she is both sad and uncertain.

She is startled by Dale Cooper, who gently places a hand on her shoulder. Cooper smiles, and his presence is reassuring.

[19]Nochimson, p. 152.

[20]It is unclear whether the One Armed Man throws the ring into the car or whether the ring finds its own way into the car. In an interview in *Wrapped in Plastic* 11 (June 1994), Al Strobel, the actor who played Mike, the One Armed Man, seems to confirm that the ring left of its own volition: "If the ring leaves Mike's finger and rolls on the floor of the car, it wasn't a deliberate thing [on Mike's part]. Mike was only trying to stop Bob." (p. 6)

[21]"We're Gonna Talk About Judy—And A Whole Lot More! An interview with Robert Engels," *Wrapped in Plastic* 58 (April 2002), p.8.

[22]Here, again, two strong (albeit circumstantial) arguments can be made that the ring either acts independently of the One Armed Man and finds its own way to Laura, or it is controlled by the will of the angels who place it within Laura's reach.

In an instant Laura's confusion and despair evaporate. Cooper's presence makes perfect sense to her as she realizes her destiny has always been connected with his in complex and subtle ways.[23]

An angel appears. Laura is filled with joy because she knows this is *her* angel. When she sees it, she recognizes the truth of

her transcendence. Her "goodness" has won. She has defeated her dark impulses and, by extension, the external evil forces that oppressed her. She has triumphed, and she is free.

Part 2: The Subject of Laura Palmer

Laura's journey in *Fire Walk With Me* was not a gentle one. She suffered and despaired and in the end, before receiving the helpful guidance of Dale Cooper, she remained confused. Those who watch *Fire Walk With Me* might also suffer and despair. Certainly most emerge from the experience confused.

Fire Walk With Me is not an easy film. It is difficult to watch, and it is difficult to comprehend. Familiarity with the series provides some guidance but also, surprisingly, some impairment. In an effort to explain David Lynch's intent with *Fire Walk With Me*, essayist David Foster Wallace has this to say:

> [*Fire Walk With Me*] sought to transform Laura Palmer from dramatic object to dramatic subject. As a dead person, Laura's existence on the television show had been entirely verbal and it was fairly easy to conceive her as a schizoid black/white construct....But the movie...attempts to present this multivalent system of objectified personas—plaid-skirted coed/bare-breasted roadhouse slut/tormented exorcism-candidate/molested daughter as an integrated and living whole: these different identities were all, the movie tried to claim, the same person. In *Fire Walk With Me*, Laura was no longer "an enigma" or "the password to an inner sanctum of horror." She now embodied, in full view, all the Dark Secrets that on the series had been the stuff of significant glances and delicious whispers.[24]

In effect, Wallace claims, Laura (of the series) was not a character, she was simply a plot-point. She embodied the mystery that motivated *other* characters to action. In *Fire Walk With Me*, however, Laura was no longer incidental to the story; she *was* the story, and as the dramatic subject of the film she had to drive the story through her choices and responses.

So does she become an "integrated and living whole"? Wallace maintains that Lynch didn't "entirely succeed at the project he set for himself in *Fire Walk With Me*,"[25] that the transformation of Laura from object to subject was "maybe an impossible thing." Wallace's careful choice of words like "maybe" and "not entirely" shows how difficult it is to pin down what happens in *Fire Walk With Me* (and that even an accomplished thinker like Wallace will not commit to claiming *Fire Walk With Me* either a success or a failure). Wallace refuses to say whether Laura was successfully re-imagined as a dramatic subject because he knows that the film is ambiguous and open to contradictory interpretations.[26]

But Laura's success as a dramatic subject is crucial for the success of *Fire Walk With Me* as a whole. The film works only if the audience can recognize Laura as a complex character whose existence transcends the trappings of the plot. She must be drawn so that we believe her behavior, so that we perceive her as actively charting the arc of her own story. Such a character is defined by her ability to change and to experience revelation. What's more, such a character must be different by story's end from what she was at the beginning.

In *Fire Walk With Me*, Laura needed to be more than a passive being whose actions are dictated by the necessities of the story. The problem is, that's *exactly* what Laura Palmer was before *Fire Walk With Me*: a sketch of a character, a mere piece of a larger narrative—she was (to borrow Wallace's words once again), a "schizoid black/white construct."

David Lynch needed to take the "idea" of Laura Palmer and bring it to life as a complex, autonomous being. But Lynch ran up against the barriers of the already-existing story. Laura was not "active" in the series—she didn't "do," she was "done to." Somehow, Lynch had to take this passive object and transform her into a character the audience could still be curious about.

Lynch had never faced a situation like this before when making a film. He always had the freedom to tell a story exactly as he saw fit, even when adapting the work of another (e.g. *Dune* and *Wild at Heart*). To Lynch, filmmaking is a process of exploration and possibility. There are no boundaries. "As soon as you start something all these things start kicking in, you are in a process, a beautiful, beautiful process with ideas and getting them onto some medium."[27] Even finished scripts remain malleable, serving as guideposts that Lynch uses to navigate the making of movies: "A script is only a way to get a kind of structure....You might think a script is com-

[23]The series confirms that Laura and Cooper shared the same dreams, and the film establishes that Cooper and Laura were aware of one another through the Red Room realm.

[24]Wallace, p. 210.

[25]Ibid., 211.

[26]It should be noted, however, that Wallace considers *Fire Walk With Me* one of Lynch's "best movies," as he claims on p. 167 of his essay in *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again*.

[27]"An Interview with David Lynch: The Mind Inside the Mind Inside *Eraserhead*," *Wrapped In Plastic* 65 (June 2003), p. 5.

plete, but it might not be....There might be opportunities and ideas coming that are so valuable."[28] For Lynch, the ideal approach to filmmaking is to be open to change and to rely on intuition.

This approach was severely hindered on *Fire Walk With Me*. For the first time, Lynch was working in a bounded world. By making *Fire Walk With Me* a prequel, a film that took place before *Twin Peaks*, Lynch was confined by the events that had been carefully proscribed by the series: Laura was killed by her father (whom she—and others—perceived as being possessed by the demonic Bob), the murder took place in a train car in the woods, Ronette Pulaski saw Bob and escaped. These things, among many others, could not be changed even if they seemed counter-intuitive or didn't "feel right" to Lynch.

Here was Lynch's problem: he had committed to bringing Laura to life, but he had to follow her story to its pre-defined end—the one in which Laura is killed. How could he make her an active character in this scenario? How could she become a person who journeys through an experience and is changed but it? Lynch knew that in a successful story Laura needed to discover something about herself. Her discovery had to lead to action, and her action had to make Laura a different person at the end of the story from what she was at the beginning. It was not enough for her to be simply a self-destructive teenager whose poor behavior and had luck results in a grisly death.

Laura had to be more than a victim. She had to take part in her own inevitable fate. But she couldn't simply choose to die (as the series suggested). She had to do something that made narrative sense, that was a logical outcome of Laura's journey.

David Lynch knew all this, but the circumstances of Laura pre-existing story gave him little room to maneuver. Still, Lynch and co-writer Robert Engels set out to develop a script in which Laura could become a fully realized character and who would ultimately "participate" in her own fate.

[28]David Lynch interviewed on the television program, *Independent Focus*, Copyright 2000, The Independent Film Channel.

Opportunities and Ideas—Changing the Script

Lynch and Engels originally conceived the story of *Fire Walk With Me* to be one in which Laura Palmer sought escape from the oppressive and pervasive presence of Bob. There were few, if any, choices for Laura to make, no real change for Laura to undergo. Bob was the antagonist, and Laura had to find a way to elude his growing power. This story was more in keeping with the facts and backstory established in the series.

At some point between completing the script and shooting the film, Lynch must have realized that he and Engels had failed to make Laura Palmer a fully-realized character. There was nothing for her to learn, no personal burden for her to overcome. The script still depicted Laura as a helpless victim whose despairing behavior and tragic death resulted from outside forces. What's more, her self-abusive activities were the consequences of being victimized.

Clearly, the film needed a dramatic ingredient that would strengthen her character.

Lynch found that in the angels—a story element that does not appear anywhere in the shooting script (Laura does not mention angels to Donna; she does not see one disappear from her bedroom painting; Ronette does not see one in the train car; and Laura does not see one in the Red Room at the end of the film). In the new version, Laura introduces the topic of angels, telling Donna that the angels will not help her, that they've "all gone away." This crucial line (the most important one in the film) establishes Laura's state of mind and shows that she has imposed boundaries on herself. (Without the angel element, the original dialogue merely hints at Laura's despair, and her exchange with Donna remains rhetorical.)

Laura wrests power away from the Little Man and Bob.

The added angel line shows that Laura has resigned herself to (and, in fact, *expects*) a tragic fate. She has given up on herself, asserting that the angels have gone because she cannot, will not, believe she has any value. She is unworthy of salvation.

But Laura is wrong, and Lynch cleverly constructs the Laura-Donna scene to signal her mistake. Lynch shot the scene using a dramatic camera angle to show that angels do, indeed, watch over Laura. The girls are viewed from high above as they talk, a shot that reflects "an angelic presence," according to *Fire Walk With Me* cinematographer Ron Garcia.[29] Cinematically, Lynch informs us that the angels have not left. Although Laura believes the angels are gone, it is *she* who is "gone...long gone" (as she explained to James in an earlier scene). Like most Lynch protagonists, Laura has "trapped" herself.

This, of course, makes Laura a far more interesting person. The introduction of the angels in *Fire Walk With Me* (and Laura's belief they have abandoned her) repositions the character of Laura Palmer in the narrative. She becomes someone with her own flaws and misperceptions. She is someone who has much to learn and who must come to recognize her own mistakes before she can grow and change—before she can escape the trap in which she has placed herself.

In the train car, when Laura sees that the angels have not abandoned Ronette, she realizes she was wrong about herself. At that moment, Laura undergoes believable and meaningful change.

Once Laura undergoes change, however, she must take some sort of definitive action as a result of that change. But the script provided no such action. When Laura is brought to the train car in the original version, she realizes that Bob is about to possess her and knows that the only escape from such possession is death. (Again, this harks back to the series, where Laura explicitly states she "had to die because it was the only way to keep Bob away from me.") She takes her only option: she turns to Leland and says, "You have to kill me." She looks at Bob in the mirror and says, "No! You can't have me." Then, again, to Leland she commands, "Kill me." And Leland does.

Lynch probably shot the scene the way it was scripted, assuming that Laura's explicit decision to end her life was a sufficient conclusion to her story (and, of course, one that perfectly fit with the facts as described on the series). Once it was shot, however, Lynch recognized that such an

[29]"Laura Palmer's Phantasmagoric Fall from Grace" by Stephen Pizzello, *American Cinematographer* Vol. 73 #9 (September 1992), p. 60.

ending was weak and ultimately unsatisfactory.

As scripted, Laura Palmer—despite her strength of character and her conviction to die—is still incapable of effecting her own fate. Arms bound, she can only order Leland to kill her. The decision is hers, but the crucial act is Leland's. She is dependent on what he does. Leland takes center stage in this important final sequence as he, now freed from Bob, performs the ugly but necessary act of murder. As a result, Leland frees Laura from possession. Further, he "re-sacrifices" himself to Bob as a consequence of Laura's escape. Scripted, the scene (and story) is essentially about Leland, not Laura. This must have been unacceptable to Lynch. The story could only succeed with Laura's taking action. He was now faced with a hard reality—he had to re-edit the murder scene and find some way to restore Laura as a narrative centerpiece.

Lynch looked closely at what the existing material (both written and shot) allowed. The One Armed Man was outside the train car. His character was connected to the Owl Cave ring. The ring could therefore make its way to Laura, and she could put it on. This would allow Laura to perform a decisive action.

The problem was, Lynch and Engels had carefully established the ring as a dangerous object. The ring was connected to Teresa Banks, whose arm went numb and who then suffered a gruesome death. Dale Cooper, a clever, intuitive, and above all, *reliable* character, explicitly warns Laura not to take the ring when the Little Man offers it. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the script contains a critical scene in which Annie Blackburne, after emerging from the Black lodge where she was taken in the final episode of *Twin Peaks*, is taken to a hospital where she is shown wearing the ring. A nurse sees it and removes the ring from Annie's finger. According to script, "with an anticipatory smile, then a selfish laugh, she puts the ring on her finger." The scene was not included in the final cut of the film, but it was shot—evidence that Lynch originally intended to depict the ring as something bad. (Why else would the nurse give a "selfish" laugh?)[30]

The accumulation of all these incidents clearly points to a dangerous Owl Cave ring. The ring, however, offered the only possible option for Lynch when he sought to re-work the murder scene.

Remarkably, Lynch saw beyond the narrative constraints imposed by wearing the ring and envisioned a scene of liberation rather than doom. He realized the ring could be viewed as an object of power rather than as an object of evil. Once Laura is certain of her own indelible goodness, she can perform the action of putting on the ring. This action shows Laura driving her own story—she no longer fears the ring, and she takes it so as to prove to Bob that she is beyond his power. (What's more, Laura can be perceived to be stealing the ring from the malevolent beings who wielded it, thereby preventing them from ever ensnaring another victim.) A few careful edits were all Lynch needed to accomplish this revision. First, he needed to remove the scene with Annie and the nurse; it contributed little to the narrative and would, in fact, weaken Lynch's new vision of the ring. Second, Lynch needed some new, minor footage to insert into the train car murder scene. Three shots were required: 1) a shot of the ring rolling across a straw-strewn floor; 2) a shot of a woman's hand placing the ring on her other hand; 3) a shot of the hand with the ring held up

[30]Heather Graham, who played Annie Blackburne, confirms the scene was filmed. In *Wrapped In Plastic* 24 (August 1996), she says, "We did film a scene where I am asleep in a hospital bed....and a nurse steals the ring off my finger." (p. 12)

before a bright white light. These three simple inserts were likely produced after the initial filming of the train car scene.[31] Lynch probably did not have the luxury or opportunity to reassemble his cast and shoot new material with the actors. Like the edits he made to the film's prologue (see *WIP* 60, page 10-11, for a detailed analysis of inserted and edited dialogue in the Philip Jeffries scene of *Fire Walk With Me*), Lynch dramatically altered the murder scene in the editing room.

Despite the restraints of the *Fire Walk With Me* narrative, David Lynch opened himself to those "valuable opportunities and ideas" that come to him during filming. The "idea" of angels and the "opportunity" of the ring presented themselves and Lynch intuitively knew they were right for *Fire Walk With Me* and that they made the film "as free and experimental as it could be within the dictates it had to follow."[32]

Laura no longer fears death; she transcends it.

Yes, it's true that Lynch's new edits introduce ambiguity to the film, and yes, it appears as if *Fire Walk With Me* abandoned narrative continuity, and yes—multiple valid readings of the film were suddenly made possible. But the new version of the murder scene—the one after Lynch's edits—becomes more complex, more daring, and more rewarding. The Laura Palmer of the film suddenly becomes different from the Laura Palmer of the series. On the show, Laura reportedly "allowed herself to die"; she submitted to death because it offered the only possible escape from Bob. In the film, however, Laura escapes from Bob *before* she dies. Her realization of her own goodness—her acceptance of the angels—makes her untouchable. In *Fire Walk With Me* death is not the means of escape—the means of escape comes from within Laura, herself. And once it does, Laura is decisively and explicitly transformed from dramatic object to dramatic subject. She at last succeeds at becoming a "living and integrated whole."

Though arguably contradictory and baffling, Lynch's changes to *Fire Walk With Me* clarify themselves once they are situated in the complex mosaic of Laura Palmer's stoty. And though the new elements of guardian angel and redefined ring complicate the narrative as presented on the television series, they succeed in the way they lift Laura Palmer out of the narrative dead end arrived at in the original film script: "Indeed, the script—lacking the angels [and] the ring...leaves Laura not much better off than she was before."[33]

When Lynch places the ring and the angel in the train car, he allows Laura to become a fully realized character. He found a way for her to choose good over evil. Once she does, Laura no longer fears death; she transcends it. She succeeds where Dale Cooper failed in the series—she faces evil with "perfect courage" and is victorious. She then leaves this world to begin a journey into a larger, more profound universe.

Conclusion

Few films are as demanding as *Fire Walk With Me*. Certainly no other David Lynch film requires as much attention and contemplation as this one does. It is exactly because *Fire Walk With Me* offers such challenges that it warrants comprehensive and exhaustive analysis. The film deserves reconsideration so that it can take its rightful place among Lynch's other great works.

Part of the reason *Fire Walk With Me* is rarely analyzed by academics, or infrequently considered by writers who wish to discuss Lynch's oeuvre, is because the film offers no easy point of entry. How does one approach *Fire Walk With Me* in order to study its themes, analyze its character dynamics, or deconstruct its narrative? Is the movie a stand-alone film, or should it be considered as another episode of *Twin Peaks*? A more common (and frequently asked) question is, "Should a new viewer to *Twin Peaks* watch the film *before* or *after* watching the series?"

Many feel strongly that *Fire Walk With Me* should be saved until after the series. The film reveals too many of the show's secrets, and it ohviates the "Who killed Laura Palmer?" mystery. But the series also imposes a certain narrow view on both the Laura Palmer character and her backstory, and it arguahly handicaps attempts at open, freer interpretations of the film.

Those familiar with the series watch *Fire Walk With Me* and find themselves reassessing Laura and reconstructing a narrative they thought they knew. Those who have never seen the series watch *Fire Walk With Me* and find themselves suddenly immersed in a confounding, Byzantine milieu from which they must assemble a comprehensible story. No wonder Michel Chion believes, "There is no way in."

But there is.

As this essay has shown, the key to appreciating the film is Laura Palmer. Those who have never experienced *Twin Peaks*—who do not know the difference between the Black Lodge and the Roadhouse, or the identity of Annie Blackburne and the Log Lady—need only focus on Laura. The film provides a complete, satisfying story arc for her character.

Laura Palmer also provides a point of entry for long-time fans of the series who, when confronted with the film, sometimes fail to see that Lynch was asking more from them than the he was before (on the series). "Indeed, *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* demand[s] a degree of belief in the fate of Laura Palmer that surpassed the comfort level of many of the series' original viewers."[34]

Lynch designed *Fire Walk With Me* to actualize Laura—to "realize" her. Once long-time viewers start seeing Laura as more than a plot component, she becomes, as Wallace observes, "complex, contradictory, real"35 and the film achieves new power.

In *Fire Walk With Me*, Lynch makes Laura a "round character"—a narrative personage defined by noted scholar Seymour Chatman as having "a variety of traits, some of them conflicting or even contradictoty; their behavior is not predictable—they are capable of changing, of surprising us." Chatman also observes:

> Round characters function as open constructs, susceptible of

[31]It is significant that we do not see Al Strobel (who played the one-armed man) throw the ring, nor do we see Sheryl Lee (who played Laura Palmer) put the ring on.
[32]*Lynch on Lynch*, p. 190.

[33]Nochimson, p. 253.

[34]"Twin Peaks, Weak Language and the Resurrection of Affect" by Sheli Ayers in *The Cinema of David Lynch: American Dreams, Nightmare Visions*, ed. by Erica Sheen and Annette Davison (London: Wallflower Press, 2004), p 101.
[35]Wallace, p. 210.

further insight. Our "readings out" are not limited to the actual period of immediate contact with the text. The character may haunt us for days or years as we try to account for discrepancies or lacunae in terms of our changing and growing insights into ourselves and our fellow beings. Great round characters seem virtually inexhaustible objects for contemplation.[36]

David Lynch wanted to make Laura live—not just on-screen, but in the imaginations of viewers who experienced her story. He wanted to make her worthy of intense thought and lively debate. And, indeed, the Laura Palmer of *Fire Walk With Me* resonates—all her contradictions and desires, her mistakes and motives coalesce into one palpable and authentic person. Long after the film has ended, Laura Palmer "haunts" the minds of those who saw her.

After making *Fire Walk With Me*, Lynch returned to the world of *Twin Peaks* one last time, writing and directing the "Log Lady introductions" to accompany episodes of the series as they were re-broadcast on the Bravo cable network. In the introduction to the pilot of *Twin Peaks*, Lynch emphasizes the importance of Laura Palmer in the *Twin Peaks* narrative, explaining that *Twin Peaks* is a story of "many but it begins with one....The one leading to the many is Laura Palmer. Laura is the one." Here, in his final artistic comment about the character, Lynch is asking viewers to assess (or reassess) the series with a realized, rounded Laura Palmer in mind—the Laura Palmer who was so vividly brought to life in *Fire Walk With Me*.

It probably doesn't matter to Lynch if viewers first watch *Fire Walk With Me* before or after the series. What is likely, however, is that Lynch hopes viewers will seek out (or return to) the series after seeing the film.

Fire Walk With Me is more than a simple a "prequel" or "sequel" to *Twin Peaks*. It functions as an informative new pathway back to the television show. The film re-introduces viewers to *Twin Peaks*, reorients both audience and narrative so that each might envision a new Laura Palmer. *Fire Walk With Me* revives Laura, reifies her, and gives her a fresh presence in the televised story.

Fire Walk With Me is David Lynch's reinvestment in *Twin Peaks*. For all its power and complexity, its intensity and emotion, *Fire Walk With Me* succeeds because of one simple thing: it forever reminds us that Laura Palmer invigorates *Twin Peaks*.

[36]Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), pp. 132-133.

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Twin Peaks Festival 2004

Each year, *Twin Peaks* fans from across the country and around the world descend on Seattle, Washington (and surrounding areas) to attend the annual Twin Peaks Festival. Like last year, *WIP* co-editor John Thorne was able to attend and report first-hand on the activities and events for this year's event. Happily, 2004 marked another year for a successful and fun festival. First-time event organizers Jordan and Kelly Chambers produced a winning show that met all our expectations and had us looking forward to another promising festival in 2005.

The following is a summary of the highlights from the 2004 Twin Peaks Festival, held July 30 – August 1. As with most of our festival reports, we describe the events of each day and report some of the comments made by the festival guests.

Friday, July 30

Sign-in at the Sallal Grange Hall:

Friday afternoon, attendees registered for the festival at the Sallal Grange Hall in North Bend, WA, where the firsr round of the annual *Twin Peaks* trivia contest was conducted. Those not participating in the trivia enjoyed coffee and donuts while they perused some of the various souvenir items and other merchandise for sale. Sign-in was over by 2:30, and everyone went off to make preparations for the Celebriry Kick-Off Dinner to be held later that evening.

Celebrity Kick-off Dinner

Friday night marks the festival's big event each year—the Celebrity Kick-off Dinner. Once again, the dinner was held at the Barn, a big, multi-level banquet hall situated among trees and near a small pond.

This year's festival boasted another great line-up of guests, some of whom had never been to the event before. They included Jennifer Lynch, James Marshall (James Hurley), Catherine Coulson (the Log Lady), Don Davis (Major Briggs), Charlotte Stewart (Betty Briggs), Andrea Hays (Heidi, the waitress), and Jan D'Arcy (Sylvia Horne).

After dinner, each celebrity was introduced with an audio clip of some of his or her more memorable lines from the series or film. The guests then took time to make a few brief comments and answer some questions. Highlights from their comments are reproduced below.

Don Davis: It is always good to come back and see old friends and new friends. It is great that this thing goes on and on and on. I've been in very remote places on various continents in the world, and everywhere I go someone comes up to me and says, "I know you from *Twin Peaks*!" Even in a fancy restaurant in Paris, the Maitre De came up and said,

Photo above: James Marshall and Jennifer Lynch

"Major Briggs!" *[Laughter]*

I've been in Vancouver filming the things that film in Vancouver. I'm getting ready to move to Santa Monica. I'm trying to pull back a little. I love acting—don't ever want to stop acting—but I'm old, and I'm tired, and I've got the chance of a lifetime. I'm supposed to do a one-man show of paintings in France in this wonderful old brick-and-stone art museum. If I can pull it off and get the paintings done—within two years I've got to complete forty to fifty original canvasses that haven't been shown before—but if I can do that, then they are going to start the show and have a five-city tour. That could change my life. *[Applause]*

Jennifer Lynch: Hi everybody! I've been really busy raising a child and having spinal surgery. I want to thank you all for signing the card that came to me.* It was literally the best medicine I had going. It fit perfectly on the wall in the room I was trapped in, and it stayed there for quite some time. I still have it rolled up in the corner of the room where I work. I just wanted to say how very much that meant to me. It was huge.

I'm working on two pictures that hopefully will start shooting this year—one starting in September and the other one, whose script I'm finishing, will be immediately following that. I feel just absolutely lucky to be here with you guys. Listen to the "Oddio" radio show [on www.davidlynch.com]!

Charlotte Stewart: I am so happy to be back here. What have I been doing in the last year? I mentioned last year that I was under exclusive contract with a commercial for ProCrit, which is a chemotherapy drug. My contract was up on June 24. I have spent my time on breast cancer research. I am a thirteen-year survivor. *[Applause]* That is one of the things I focus on every year. I also just volunteered for the AIDS Project LA. So I have been busy; I just haven't been acting. Hopefully next year at this time I will have something to report back. I want to say again that we are so appreciative that you keep coming back each year and are so dedicated to *Twin Peaks*. For those of you who have come for the first time, "Thank you."

James Marshall: First of all, thank you for having me up here. I am sorry I have missed all those years. Like Jennifer, I had a bunch of surgeries and weirdness and "life-stuff." It is so beautiful to come back here and see the trees and the massive beauty. I have you to thank for that. You guys are really cool. It instills in me a sense of hope and a reminder that people still like poetry.

I haven't been doing much. I have been doing some independent movies and some small stuff and a couple of clunkers—which were fun as hell to do so I thank God I did them.

Question: *Jennifer, do you have any pull with the old man about getting the second season of* Twin Peaks *released on DVD?*

Lynch: Do I have pull with the old man? I can certainly talk to him about it. I know it is equally important to him as it is to all of you. Being that he has many irons in the fire at all times it isn't everyday that he is banging on someone's door saying, "Where's the second season?" But I will reiterate to him how important that is and make sure that it is expedited, if nothing else.

Question: *James, in the second season story where your character ran off—did you ever think there was a connection between the fact that James did that and the fact that his mother supposedly did the same thing?*

Marshall: That's interesting. I think that was it. The character came from such a heavy dysfunctional family—which I loved. The stuff [the writers] did was amazing. Whatever sort of detached attitude I took was already explained.

You know, I never found my character at all [during the series.] It was always mushy or "almost there." How much mystery do you keep? There's not much character in brooding. It became mystery, then brood, then mope. I had all this past, and I was trying to play too much at once, so it would jam up. Then David would play the jam-up and say, "Oh, good!" I didn't find the character until we shot the last scene in *Fire Walk With Me*—the last scene that I ever did in the last movie! I said, "This is it! Here is where he needs to be!" Then it was, "Bye-bye!"

Question: *What is it like for actors to look at yourselves on screen? Are you critical?*

Stewart: I hate myself! The first time I see myself on screen [on each project], I think, "Oh, my God! What a terrible choice I made. Why did I wear that?" And then you get a little distance on it. But I always think I could have done it better, because there is something that

(L-R) Andrea Hays, Charlotte Stewart, and Don Davis

*2002 festival attendees sent a get-well card to Jennifer.

happens between the time I work on something and the time it comes on the air. I've re-thought it two or three times. And I'll think, "Why didn't I do it differently?" Then two or three years will pass by, and I'll see it, and I'll go, "That was pretty good!" I am a real bad critic of myself. I should never watch myself. There's a theory that says actors should never watch dailies. In my opinion they shouldn't because [when you do] you start changing things, and you shouldn't. When David was directing, you just tried to follow everything he said and not try to guess why he asked you to do something. Sometimes he had an end in sight that you couldn't figure out.

Davis: An actor can't be objective. You are constantly making choices. You hope they are the right choices. Very often they are not. You can't divorce your physical being from the character, so if you have any hang-ups about yourself, you see them. Unless you're the lead character, the scene is never yours. If you are a character actor, your role is to further the plot or bring about some reaction or action that reveals something about the main character. So, it's not like the viewer getting lost in the story. You can't get lost in the story. Every shot that you do, you have at least four or five different shots—master and close-ups and different points-of-view—it's not like a viewer watching *Twin Peaks* or any other program. There is always the feeling that we wish we could have done it a little bit better, and maybe that work will have been a spark to some director or producer's eye and will lead to little better role. And that will lead to bigger roles, and we will make enough money so that we will never have to do it again! *[Laughter]*

Question: *James, you mentioned that something happened in real life with David that made it into the film. Can you tell us what that was?*

Marshall: The scene with the gun on the sign of the "Bang-Bang Saloon." You know, it reminded a lot of *Eraserhead*, because it was one of those pay-off situations. David was standing in the middle of an empty parking lot at night. It was raining, and he was just staring down—the bill of his hat was straight down. I was way across the lot with the trailers and everything. I came walking across to make sure he was okay, because he was in the same position for a very long time. *[Laughter]* He said, "It's just beautiful!" I looked down, and the "bang-bang" was reflected in the puddle, and one "bang" was on a cigarette butt, and the other "bang" was on a different cigarette butt. Then there was this stick that was the gun. He said, "Should I shoot it?" I am standing here—a kid who grew up with *Eraserhead*—and David Lynch is asking my advice! That was so cool!

Question: *Jennifer, I read somewhere that your nickname is "Treefrog." Where did that come from, and does you dad still call you that?*

Lynch: He does. Officially, I'm "Jenno." I think he caught me looking a certain way one day, and he said, "You're a Treefrog!" I don't see it. But sometimes if I hold very still and imagine being small and green, maybe it comes to be.

Question: *Jennifer, when you were writing* The Secret Diary of Laura Palmer, *did you feel any restrictions because the story was already partially known? Also, could you make any alterations? And did you ever envision it as a film?*

Lynch: Here's the funny thing about this. Because my father and I are both meditators, there was a time when he would pick me up and we would spend weekends or evenings together. I would do my meditation in the car. I remember coming out of this meditation one time, and he had been looking at me, and he said, "What are you thinking about?" And I said, "I had this little fantasy about finding some girl's diary and trying to figure out if she thinks the same things I do. Is she afraid of the same things I am? Or am I off, somewhere?" Years and years passed, and when *Twin Peaks* was on he said, "Would you be interested in writing Laura's diary?" He took me into a room with Mark Frost, and he said, "You will be one of three air-breathing mammals who knows who killed Laura. Are you willing to take on that responsibility?" *[Laughter]* I was excited about the responsibility, but they were very serious about it—I mean, the curtains were drawn! There's Mark and Dad, and they are just dead serious.

In doing this I got to fulfill my own fantasy, and I found it helpful that certain characters were laid out for me. So I was able to ask questions in the telling. It was defined that way. I don't know that it wouldn't make a good film project. I sort of feel what's precious about it is how precious Laura is in her disaster. There is something universal in her suffering, even though we don't all suffer that way. In the adolescent mind we all think we do. The end of the world is in your teens because nobody understands you. Whether or not there is this horrible thing happening to you in the woods, or in your own home, or in you own heart, that is a little bit of what it's like.

Question: *For everyone—Who was you favorite actor to work with in* Twin Peaks*?*

Jan D'Arcy: I liked Russ Tamblyn. He was fun.

Marshall: It seems like there was way too huge of a cast to answer that. It was a fun set. There was a lot of legends [like] Richard Beymer. I would come to the set and sing "Maria." And then there was Russ Tamblyn, and I would look at him and do a knight thing. But then I got to work with all these great actors. Two years later I got to work with John Savage because of *Twin Peaks*. It's fun. It was neat. Don was really cool, too!

Andrea Hays: Vic Tayback. *[Laughter]* I didn't work with that many people, but I got to hang out with Mädchen Amick. She was very nice, and she gave great hugs!

Stewart: I love Kimmy Robertson! *[Applause]* Kimmy was able to put a twist on every single line she gave, and it was like no other. I don't know anybody else who could have played that part. She absolutely made it. It just makes me laugh to think about it. Like James said, every day coming to work it was just amazing. To watch Joan Chen and Russ Tamblyn—and David—playing his character. That was just mind-blowing. It was so much fun to come to work. We had these two sets, two soundstages. So there was sometimes two shows shooting at the same time. You could walk back and forth and go from the diner to somebody's home. It

was so much fun, and I miss it so much!

Davis: Everybody was wonderful. But hands down, every time I got to be with Charlotte was one of the best days of my life. *[Applause]*

Costumes, Trivia and Laura's Diary

Next up was the annual costume contest followed by the last round of *Twin Peaks* trivia. Fans were then treated to the teal highlight of the evening as Jennifer Lynch read excerpts for Laura's diary. Sitting before a rapt audience, Lynch read for over forty minutes, choosing a variety of entries from the diary. She had publicly read from the diary only once before but not for many years. She seemed to enjoy performing for the crowd, and her efforts were met with loud applause.

Catherine Coulson (with log) and Charlotte Stewart

Saturday, August 16

Bus Tours and Twede's Cafe

As usual, Saturday's events included a bus tour that visited famous filming locations from both the *Twin Peaks* pilot and *Fire Walk With Me*. These sights included Reinig Road (where the Twin Peaks sign was located during filming), The Salish Lodge (Great Northern exterior) and Snoqualmie Falls (White Tail Falls), the Weyerhaeuser Mill office (Twin Peaks Sheriff's station), and the Mt. Si Motel (Blue Diamond City Motel from *FWWM*), among others. Meanwhile, fans could visit Twede's Cafe (the Double R Diner) for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Film Night – Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me

By late afternoon attendees made their way into downtown Seattle and began lining up inside the Seattle Art Museum, this year's forum for film night. The museum lobby was decorated with rare *Twin Peaks* posters supplied, like last year, by Adam Stevenson of www.lynchposters.com.

Film night began with a number of short Lynch-related pieces. First was a screening of the theatrical trailers for every feature film directed by David Lynch. Next up was all four of the Japanese Georgia Coffee commercials, featuring Kyle MacLachlan, Catherine Coulson, Kimmy Robertson, Michael Horse, Harry Goaz, and Mädchen Amick, all reprising their *Twin Peaks* roles. Catherine Coulson, who arrived just before these showed, could be overheard exclaiming, "Georgia Coffee! I've never seen these!" Following the commercials, the *Twin Peaks*-themed shorts continued, first with a clip from the 1991 MTV Music Awards featuring Chris Isaak and Kyle MacLachlan, then an *Entertainment Tonight* piece on the premiere of *FWWM*, and a *Good Morning America* piece featuring an interview with MacLachlan and Lynch about *Twin Peaks* and *FWWM*.

Next was a recent, ten-minute BBC retrospective about *Twin Peaks* that included interviews with Sheryl Lee, Kyle MacLachlan, and Mark Frost (as well as a number of British radio and TV personalities). The piece provided a respectful and funny look back at one of the most important TV shows in history.

After these short pieces, there was a brief intermission, followed by another diary reading by Jennifer Lynch. A few moments after she was done, *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* played.

Sunday, August 19

Cherry Pie Picnic

The festival's final event, the Cherry Pie Picnic, took place on Sunday morning at Olallie State Park (film location for the Deer Meadow Sheriff's Station as well as the site where Teresa Banks's plastic-wrapped body floated downstream).

The celebrities present were Jennifer Lynch, Charlotte Stewart, and Catherine Coulson.

Sandwiches, drinks, and chips were on hand as festival-goers sat around in the shade and chatted while they enjoyed the gorgeous Sunday morning. Later, Josh Eisenstadt gave informative tours of the "Deer Meadow Sheriff's Station"— now a private residence of the local park ranger who graciously opened her home for festival attendees.

Until Next Year

The 2004 Twin Peaks Festival was another major success because of the great efforts of Kelly, Jordan, and their many hard-working assistants (including Jared Lyon and Amanda Golby). For more information about the festival from these folks, check out their great Web site, www.twinpeaksgazette.com. We look forward to seeing them all at another fun festival next year!

Twin Peaks Marathon in Austin

The Alamo Drafthouse Cinema, just down the street from the capital in Austin, Texas, hosted a *Twin Peaks* marathon that began at noon Saturday, July 17 and lasted until about noon Sunday. *Peaks* actresses Kimmy Robertson and Phoebe Augustine were on hand to talk about the show, and coffee and pie were served to all attendees (a sold-out crowd of two hundred).

The episodes were projected on the big screen from first-season DVDs and second-season laserdiscs (supplied by *Peaks* expert Josh Eisenstadt, also in attendance). The DVDs looked particularly sharp, with a noticeable decline once the laserdiscs began (though still preferable to videotapes). It reminded us once again how much we missed the availability of second-season DVDs.

Program director Kier-la (sounds like "Kayla") Janisse kept things moving along. Short breaks were scheduled between every couple of episodes, with an extended break before the first-season finale in which *WIP*'s Craig Miller moderated a Q&A on stage with Robertson and Augustine (see below).

Kimmy Robertson and Phoebe Augustine

Many in the crowd appeared to be in their twenties, so it's possible that some had not seen the series in its entirety. However, the audience clearly had its favorites, made obvious during the opening credits of the pilot, with Kyle MacLachlan, Sherilyn Fenn, and Robertson each receiving significant applause.

It became clear late Saturday night that the schedule was slipping a bit behind, so one episode was skipped (the Diane Keaton-directed episode 2015) to allow time for a closing trivia contest (hosted by Eisenstadt) following the last episode. About one-third of the attendees stuck it out through all of the episodes.

While we've heard of a number of in-home *Peaks* marathons through the years, this is the first theatrical marathon, as far as we know. Perhaps its success will encourage other theaters to do it, or the Alamo Drafthouse to try it again in the future.

Miller: *Before we take some questions from the audience, did you first want to mention anything about how you got your parts, or some general comments about your roles in* Twin Peaks*?*

Augustine: *[to Kimmy]* You're awesome! *[Applause from audience.]*

CM: *Okay, who has a question?*

Question from audience: *Are either of you ladies single?* [Laughter]

Robertson: Yep.

PA: No.

Q: *To what extent does David Lynch allow the actors to ad-lib, particularly for Kimmy's role?*

KR: I don't really know what he did for everybody else, but I know for me, it was partly-scripted and partly ad-libbed. The perfect example is when he asked me to tell the sheriff that he has a call, and he asked me how Lucy would very specifically tell him which phone the call is being put through on. He often would say that: *[imitating Lynch]* "Now hoooow would Luuuuucy say such-and-such?" In the second season, when he wasn't around, Lucy said other people's words, like I wanted to say "*a* fly," and they made me say "*the* fly." *[Laughter]* It was a big plot point. *[Laughter]*

CM: *We hear different stories depending on which actor we talk to. Miguel Ferrer said, "High-level meetings were held if you wanted to change a single word." It's also been suggested that maybe the "high-level meetings" didn't really need to take place. They were just saying that to prevent the actors from getting carried away.*

KR: They like their meetings.

CM: *Phoebe, you mentioned that you were in Seattle when you were hired for the role of Ronette. Talk a little bit about how David found you for the role.*

PA: It was my understanding that all of the big parts were cast already, and they had some extra parts to cast up in Seattle. We just went in to audition and read for him. I don't know how he decided who would get which parts. I do remember being asked, when there were a few of us there, me and Sheryl Lee, "Do either of you have a problem with nudity?" And I said, "Um, I think I might." And she said, "I have no problems." *[Laughter]* I think that's how I got Ronette, although today I couldn't imagine anybody else being Laura Palmer, so it worked out great.

KR: Always remember that if you want a career in acting, just say yes. *[Laughter]*

CM: *At the time the pilot was shot, were you being hired specifically as a one-time thing? Did you*

think you were going to have a much larger part? What did they tell you?

PA: I didn't expect it to turn into more than it was. Actually *Fire Walk With Me* was kind of a surprise. I didn't know that was coming. But, you know, I was in a coma! *[Laughter]*

CM: But Lynch brought you back for the series finale, even though we hadn't heard from the character in a long time.

PA: Yeah, that was a surprise. When I went to L.A. to do some looping, I ended up doing a couple of other auditions while I was down there. I was on a series for CBS for about six episodes. That was nice.

KR: What was the show?

PA: It was on Saturday nights at 8. It was called *Frannie's Turn*. I don't know if you remember it, but it was fun.

Q: Did the actors know in advance what the storylines would be?

KR: No. They sent us a couple of scripts [at first]. Then they started just sending us out pages, because there were leaks. So they just sent us out pages. Sometimes it was just one [page]. They sent me my page. *[Laughter]*

CM: On the first page of some of the scripts, they had a line that said something like, "Because of the serial nature of the episodes, it is very important that no details get released."

KR: They told us not to throw the scripts away in the trash.

CM: It's twelve years later, so maybe it's hard to remember that at the time, the "Who killed Laura Palmer" mystery had reached an intense level, and the network and producers wanted to make sure it remained a mystery for as long as possible.

Q: Who did you like working with the best?

KR: I liked working with David best, obviously as a director. I think I only ever worked with three [actors]—the people in the [sheriff's] office. *[Laughter]* The sheriff, Michael [Ontkean], was great. And Harry [Goaz] was great. And Dana. And that's my story.

PA: I also did not work with a great variety of people. But I remember Kyle [MacLachlan] and Michael being very nice to me, very nice to hang out with when we weren't filming.

Q: A follow-up to the earlier question: did David Lynch know what was coming in the storylines? Was there an explanation for everything that was happening?

PA: I think he must have from the beginning. I don't know about *everything*, but I know that during the filming of the scene on the railroad track, there were a *lot* of people at the end of that track. I had to walk down the track a few times, and I remember when we were taking a break, I asked for David to come over so I could ask him a question, because one of the people on the crew was really freaking me out. And it was a huge crowd of people. David came over, and I asked him, "That guy over there—he's really freaking me out. He's scaring me. Who is it? Does he have to be there?" It was Frank [Silva]! David said to me, "Shhh! He's the bad guy. But don't tell anyone!" *[Laughter]* Was he a lighting guy or something?

KR: Set decorator.

PA: Frank was a set decorator at the time, and that day, when we were filming the pilot, David knew that he was the bad guy. So I think he did know [a lot of things] in advance.

KR: Frank was on the set when we did the thing where Harry was playing the trumpet, and I was playing paddleball.* That was the first time I saw him. Totally freaked me out. And Little Mike [J. Anderson] did kinda freak me out, too. *[Laughter]* They were all walking around talking backwards. I was like, "Wow, what a cool job!" So much better than my Bob's Big Boy commercial. *[Laughter]*

CM: If you have the Faber and Faber book Lynch on Lynch *by Chris Rodley, Lynch implies he knew some of the things that were coming up while other things surprised him. He says he and Mark Frost knew the identity of the killer from the beginning, but they barely even spoke about it between themselves to maintain some distance. On the other hand, when he saw Agent Cooper wearing flannel shirts in the second season, he said that he was a little bit surprised at that and thought that the character had ceased to be one hundred percent Cooper for him. So there were some things that surprised him after he came back from taking a break during the second season to promote* Wild At Heart *overseas. He also didn't realize that the* Invitation to Love *segments would be played so broadly.*

Q: What's the strangest request you ever received?

KR: There are lots of strange requests, especially at wrap parties. *[Laughter]* But in the pilot, when David was talking about how obsessive Lucy was, and everything has to be perfect, and then I walked into the room and saw a thousand donuts, that was just the perfect—. In my head I just went, "Oh God, I never even went that far!" He goes so far beyond my brain limits. *[Laughter]*

PA: I don't remember any strange requests, but I do remember some unique techniques that he has. He struck me as a very innocent soul. Very innocent. I remember he would do this thing where, to give you an incentive to get the scene done and get it right, he would put a stick of chewing gum up on the camera. *[To Kimmy]* Did he ever do that for you? *[Laughter]* When you finished the scene, and it was done, you could have the piece of gum. *[Laughter]* I thought that was nice.

KM: Comedy doesn't require chewing

*This scene appears in the European version of the pilot (which was the version released on videotape and laserdisc).

TWIN PEAKS MARATHON

SAT, JULY 17
NOON
ALAMO DOWNTOWN

EVERY EPISODE FROM BOTH SEASONS BACK TO BACK TO BACK!

You are a die hard fan. You've seen all the episodes, you eat cherry pie, you have an unhealthy attraction to logs, you can dance like a freakish dwarf, you have cruised the Dresden Lounge in search of the tall man. But have you ever watched all 29 episodes of *Twin Peaks* in one sitting? We believe this to be the true litmus test of *Twin Peaks* fandom. We'll have bottomless cups of hot, black coffee, dwarf dancing contests, cherry stem tying contests and more! We may even have an actual *Twin Peaks* celebrity come down for the occasion. Check the web for more details, and get plenty of sleep on Friday the 16th, because it's going to be a long and very strange night.

gum.

CM: You were in so many episodes, did you notice a distinct difference between being directed by David Lynch and the others, and how much of a difference was there with the feel on set

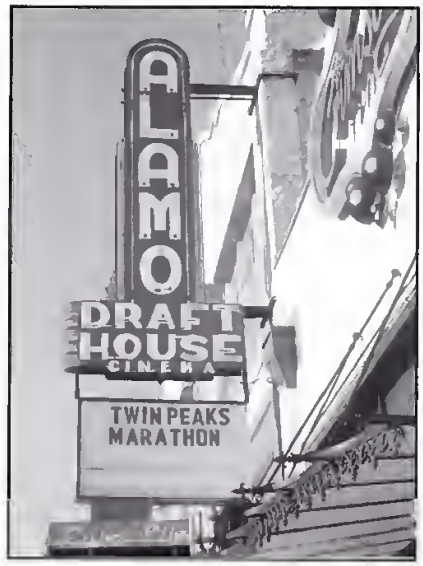
KR: Caleb Deschanel seemed to honor the way David directed and tried to impose his stuff through David's mojo. Technical term. *[Laughter]* Then Uli Shamuli [Uli Edel], or whatever his name was, his thing was to turn the camera upside down, and—you know this is my pet peeve, don't you?—and then do twenty-five takes. And Michael Ontkean and Kyle got so mad, and Michael Horse, that they started cutting the cheese at around the eighteenth take. *[Laughter]* So when I think of Uli, I think of farting. *[Laughter]*

PA: There was one that a woman directed—I can't remember her name—

CM: Lesli Glatter?

PA: Maybe. I just remember her leaving the lighting and everything to the people whose job it is do handle that, and I remember David knowing *exactly* how everything should look, and being involved in the lighting, and knowing all of that. She just left that part of that to them.

I liked working with David the best, too. He was so involved! Like, he would tie the ropes around our wrists *himself! [Laughter]*



KR: When I went to work on the first season, and I got to the sheriff's office, there was an itty-bitty picture of a tree, and I said, "David, that's the wrong tree." He looked at it and said, "*Holy smokes! That's the wrong tree!" [Laughter]* There were whole bunches of stuff like that, and if you did that to any other director, they would just ignore you, but he would call up and have a bigger tree painted. *[Laughter]*

Q: I have a question for Kimmy. Do you mind if I finish your beer? [Laughter]

KR: No Adam, go ahead. It's probably boiling by now.

CM: I'm being told we have time for one more.

Q: What was your best time on the set?

KR: I think my best time was sitting with David in a room talking about raccoons at my aunt and uncle's cabin at Bass Lake, talking about that and how weird people are in the country. We just seemed to have hours and hours and hours. Then I found out whenever I had those kinds of conversations with him, it was because he was writing. That turned up in something. Josh [Eisenstadt] would know.

PA: I was going to say pretty much the same thing. I was sitting in the set of the cabin with the door closed and four of us in there, and David telling us stories—weird stories about his Russian neighbors, and he saw this little kid running along and then he disappeared and then reappeared ten feet farther, and other dimensions and things like that. It was just a long time for being on a set, where time is money, and just going on talking, relaxing, telling stories. And then Deepak [Nayar], first A.D. [assistant director] Deepak, would come running in: "David, we have to hurry, we have to hurry up." "Oh Deepak, not yet! Longer!" That's my favorite time too—talking to David.

CM: All right. We're about to watch the first season finale and then will go on to the second season premiere.

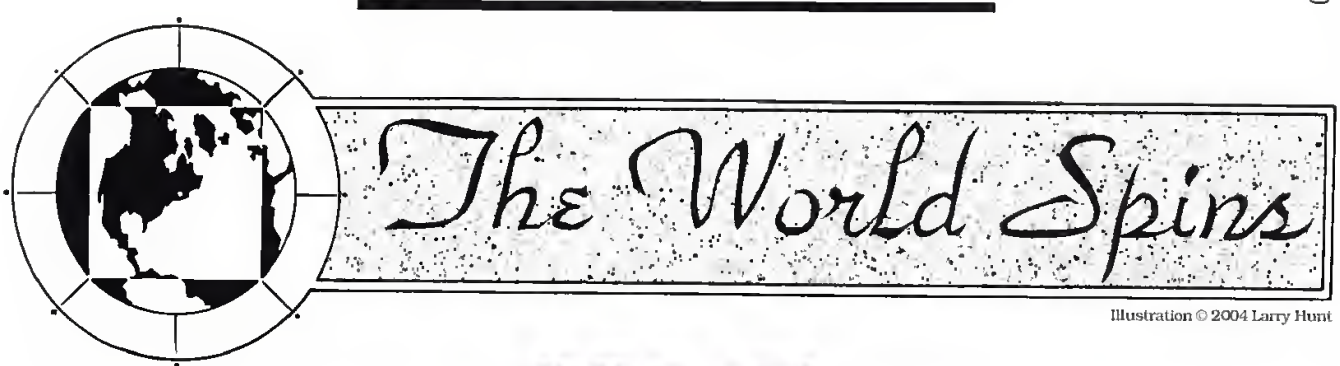


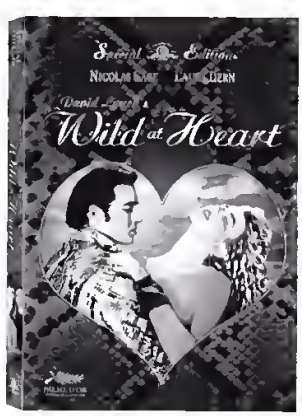
Illustration © 2004 Larry Hunt

Wild at Heart DVD Announced

According to DVDtimes.com and Dugpa.com, MGM Home Entertainment has scheduled the *Wild At Heart Special Edition* region 1 DVD for a December 7 release. The disc features David Lynch's supervision of a newly remastered high-definition transfer and new 5.1 surround sound by Lynch and John Neff. Running time is listed at 124 minutes.

The picture will be 2.35:1 anamorphic widescreen, and the Special Edition will contain lots of extras:

- "Dell's Lunch Counter" contains all-new interviews with Nicolas Cage, Laura Dern, David Lynch, Willem Dafoe, Diane Ladd and Sheryl Lee.



- "Love, Death, Elvis & Oz: The Making of Wild At Heart," a new thirty-minute documentary.
- "Specific Spontaneity: Focus on David Lynch," with cast and crew comments on working with Lynch.
- "David Lynch - On the DVD," Lynch provides insight on the film's transfer to DVD
- "Original EPK featurette," a seven-minute featurette from the original promotional campaign.
- "Sailor & Lula Image Gallery," sixty-five behind-the-scenes photos.
- Original theatrical trailer.
- TV spots.

The suggested retail will be $19.98.

Johnny Reno:

Making Music (Both Good and Bad) With Chris Isaak!

Musician/actor Johnny Reno has had a long career, but he came to our attention just recently as Chris Isaak's goofy cousin Ordell in the first season of Showtime's Chris Isaak Show *(see* Wrapped in Plastic *64). Later that we realized that he had played on three of Isaak's CDs (*San Francisco Days, Baja Sessions, *and the phenomenal* Forever Blue*).*

Craig Miller interviewed him on September 2. The discussion about most of his film-related work, especially his work with filmmakers Robert Rodriguez and Andy Anderson (Reno scored the soundtrack to Learning Curve*), appears in* Spectrum *35 (on sale now). The sections about Isaak seemed more germane to* WIP *and appear here. Our thanks to Reno for talking with us.*

***Miller:** Often David Lynch will know ahead of time, before he shoots, what music he wants to use for a particular scene. Sometimes he'll play it from speakers during filming so that the actors can get into the mood he wants.*

Reno: That's what Robert [Rodriguez] does. That's what we've been doing with *Sin City* [based on the Frank Miller comics]. We've got a lot of dark background music for some of the scenes that are really atmospheric. He'd have the music going, like this piece that I have for one of the weirder love scenes, while they were shooting it. It helps the actors get into the whole vibe of it. With *Sin City*, it's shot nearly all on green screen. They're working strictly from the storyboards and the graphic novels, so they don't have all the props to work from. The music really does help to set the atmosphere.

I think with guys that work like that, you'll notice a certain *thing* happens with their films. There's a connection there where, if you're paying attention, it's got another level to it. If David's got a piece from Angelo Badalamenti—and Quentin [Tarantino]'s starting to do that a lot now. The guys who are on the curve, out there on the edge, they know how much the music can be made to be useful. I'm not saying it's better, necessarily, but it's got a different kind of layer.

***CM:** How did you end up hooking up with Chris Isaak?*

JR: I played on three records and toured with him for six years. I was with him from about '89 to the end of '95, pretty much touring all the time and playing all the time, and in the meantime I was doing my recording projects and other stuff when he would take some time off to work on a film.

I met him when I was on tour with my own band in San Francisco back around '80 or '81. We wound up playing at a club together. He was just starting out. He didn't even have a [record] deal or anything. We jammed around a bunch. He said, "If I ever get things going, I'm going to call you to come play with me." I was like, "Ah, great." You meet a million guys like that. And he didn't seem particularly more talented than anybody else at that time. But it turns out he could write a pretty good song later on!

> So Chris [Isaak] said, "We gotta make something up. Just make something up really bad!"

We kept in touch a lot, and we'd see each other a couple times a year on tour. We'd hang out, and when "Wicked Game" took off, he called me and said, "Man, I'm making money. You want to come play?" I went, "Yeah, yeah." One tour ended up being almost six years!

***CM:** "Wicked Game" is one of his greatest songs.*

JR: It's a brilliant song. I have a good story about that. He sent me the record before it came out, and I just played that song over and over. "Man, this thing is really weird and great." At the time there was a big DJ in Dallas, Redbeard. I called him up and said, "You gotta' listen to this song." He listened to it and said, "Ah man, that's great!" And we both went, "Radio will never play it, will they?" "No, they won't. But this is *great!*"

You may know this story, but the song wasn't in *Wild at Heart* yet. The record *[Heart Shaped World]* came out in '89. "Wicked Game" wasn't the single; it was something else. The record came out in May of '89, and it didn't do much. By 1990 Chris was already working on another record. The record company wasn't behind the other one any more, and nobody was paying any attention to it. Evidently David Lynch was a huge fan of Chris's music, and by early '90 David had finished *Wild at Heart*. He didn't like the score music behind two or three of the scenes, so he called Chris and said, "Can I just use your music?" So I think he used "Wicked Game" without a vocal, and "Blue Spanish Sky" without a vocal, and something else.

Chris said yeah, then kept going on his new record, and the film came out. Everybody was paying attention to it. The soundtrack came out on a different label in England, on Polygram. So Polygram had the rights to do the soundtrack for England and Europe. They put it out, and this really influential DJ on the BBC—I can't think of his name at the moment—had gone to see the movie and recognized it as Chris's music. He went and dug the song out and started playing it, and it just went straight up the charts, "Wicked Game," with the vocals. It got going really strong over there. This number one DJ in Atlanta at the same time had seen the film

© Showtime

Ordell (Reno) plays a song for Chris Isaak.

and also had gune and dug up the song; he was also a fan of Chris's. But it's hard to get airplay. Anyway, at this huge radio station, he started playing it all the time. One night he played it something like twenty times, practically over and over! And people went nuts. All of a sudden Chris got a phone call from the record company going, "Chris, you got a hit record." Chris was like, "Really? I'm still working on the new one! What is it?" "It's 'Wicked Game.'" "'Wicked Game'? That's a hit?"

I remember getting a call in August of 1990. He called me and goes, "Hey man, the weirdest thing is, I got a hit record!" I said, "I know. They're playing it all the time on Dallas radio stations!" Because Redbeard subscribed to the same journal as the guy in Atlanta and saw, "Wow, Chris's record was getting played more than anybody's record in the country, and it's over a year old." So Redbeard went and started playing it, and it just took off. So Chris called me and said, "Man, I gotta go on tour, because the record's hot! You want to go?" I went, "Yeah, that's great. Let's go!"

I'd played with him a couple of dates in '89 out in California. I did about a two-week tour with him just for fun. We just thought we'd try it out to see how it worked.

CM: You're on sax, right?

JR: Yeah, I'm on sax, and a little bit of keyboards. So six months later Chris calls me up and says, "I got a hit record. What am I going to do? I gotta go to England!" "Okay, let's go." That record was gigantic in Europe. It was big here, but there it was huge—it was like being on tour with Elvis over there, because he's such an icon. They love that kind of stuff. So that really took off for him.

CM: When they wanted you to play Ordell on Chris's Showtime series, had you done a lot of acting previously?

JR: I've been acting since the late '80s. I took some time off and studied and did some theater. I did a couple of TV shows and a pilot. I always pursued it somewhat as things came along. So I was into acting, and Chris was into acting, so we were always trying to hustle jobs. When one of us would get a job, we'd look over the script and read to each other. That was always fun, because he's into the same kind of stuff I've always been into, the *noir*, and the character actors, and all that stuff. The Robert Mitchum *noir* stuff—we're crazy for that.

CM: You were in just two episodes of The Chris Isaak Show, *right?*

JR: Yeah. I was hopeful that I was going to be more of a returning character. That was the idea. But I think the producers thought I took up too much real estate. *[Laughter]*

CM: It was a great character.

JR: It's funny, because that's the character basically that I would do on tour when we're getting stupid, and we've spent twenty hours on a bus, and we're in the middle of nowhere. We'd get off, and I'd be the hillbilly cuusin, basically. So we had kind of a whole routine going already.

Chris called me when he got the show: "I want you to do something." I said, "Okay. I'll do whatever." During the fitst season, he was looking several scripts ahead and said, "We've got this part for a hillbilly-

Reno on The Chris Isaak Show

type guy, my ex-con cousin, and the producers didn't want to bring anybody up from L.A., because they'd have to pay SAG scale." They were trying to find somebody in Canada. They'd auditioned four, five, six guys. He said, "Man, we can't find anybody to do this. We want you to come up and have a whack at it." I was like, "Yeah, great." The producers didn't know me from Adam, and neither did the director. They were saying, "This character's got a pretty big part in this thing," and I show up there, and they thought, "Who *are* you?" They didn't realize I'd worked with Chris for years. We knew each other, so I just walked on the first day of the shoot, and it was the club scene where I'm playing with my cover band doing the Chris Isaak songs, and I'm going nuts, and they didn't really know what they were getting. But I just took off and went crazy. They're like, "Oh great. He can do this! We don't have tu cut him out!" They got all worked up about it, and they invited me back for the other episode about four or five months into the shooting. I thought, "Great! I'm going to get a regular character!"

I don't really knuw what happened. I asked Chris, and he said, "I don't know either." I guess they didn't want to spend the money. They have to pay more money to have someone come up, because they shot it all in Canada.

CM: Ordell has no musical talent, which was one of the main jokes about the character. Because of your own musical talent, was it tough to be so bad when performing on the show? At one point Chris asks you to sing a song from your heart, and you come up with something goofy about a girl, and a tree, and whatever. [Laughter]

JR: I wrote that on the spot. *[Laughter]* They had a whole different song that they'd already had somebody write, and Chris and I were looking at the script in his trailer, and he said, "Man, this sucks. We can't do this. This is too good. It's not bad enough" *[Laughter]* He was always on their ass about, "You guys don't get any of this." He was always on this rampage. Him and Kenny [Dale Johnsun] and the band, "We know how this goes, and we know what's funny. And the stuff Hollywoud thinks is funny, and the writers, they're not funny. We've seen it a million times." *The King of Queens* or *Everybody Loves Raymond*. It's the same gag over and over. So they would take and re-write a lot of the show—Chris and Kenny back there ripping dialogue out and writing their own dialogue. Really, they made it a lot of what it is. I have to give them credit. So Chris said, "We gotta make something up. Just make something up really bad!" How do you make something really bad? We looked at each other and went, "All our lives we've been trying to make this stuff *good*. So here you are, you're on TV, and you got to do something like you don't know what you're doing." Karma is weird! So he just picked up a ukulele—he's always got a ukulele—and started dicking around, "The girl by the tree." He said, "Just go with that. Don't even think abnut it. Just do it when we roll the camera. Make it up as you go." That was one take, baby! *[Laughter]* Oh God, we were laughing. It was so bad. There's a lot of that stuff on the set in that show, where you just make stuff up as you go.

The thing about getting guys like us to do stuff like that, is that we've been on stage for all our lives. We're not afraid to try stuff. We're good enough, so if we want to sound like we don't know what we're doing, it's no big deal. But the irony wasn't lost on us.

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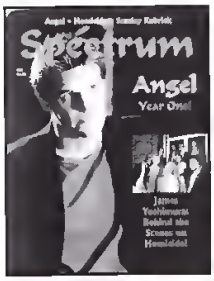

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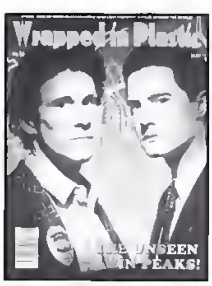

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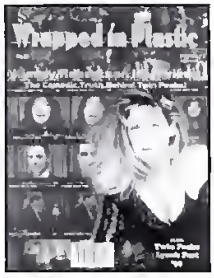

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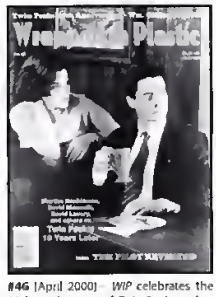

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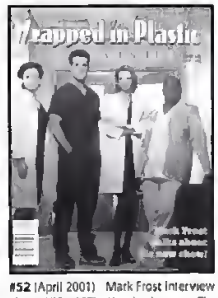

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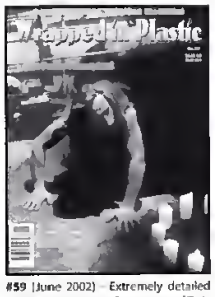

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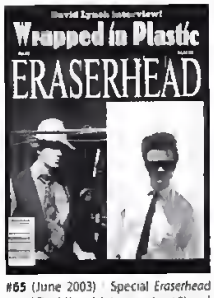

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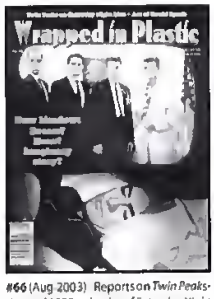

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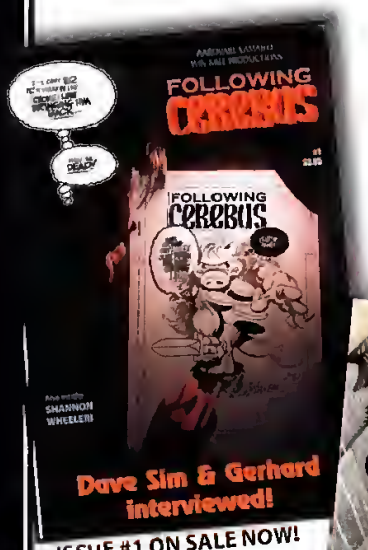

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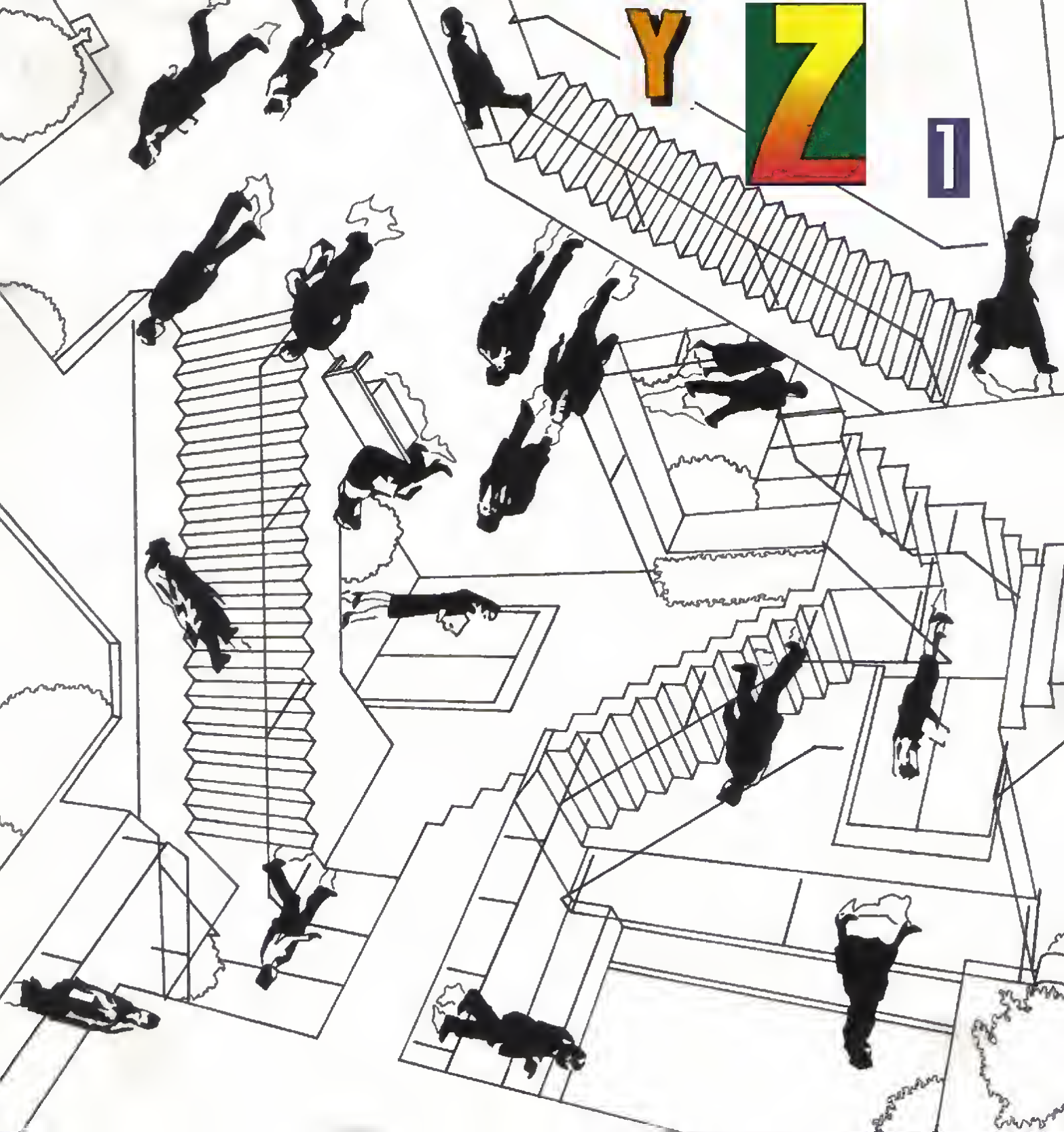
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